

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



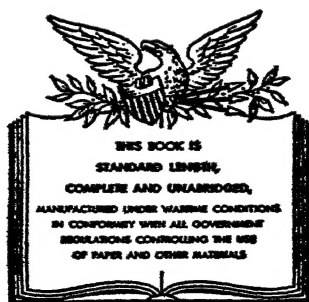
111 542

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

THE GAY ILLITERATE is the amusing and revealing memoirs of a woman who is variously known as the most powerful woman in Hollywood, an omniscient movie columnist, a warm-hearted friend, and the most successful newspaperwoman in America. Her succinct and enjoyable comments on the Hollywood picture are known to American readers of the four hundred newspapers in which her column is syndicated.

Louella tells us the hows and whys and wherefores of the material she writes about the stars. She tells of the way in which she first became a newspaperwoman on the Hearst papers, of her establishment in Hollywood as the know-all and tell-all of the movie world. She tells of her enemies but much more of her friends. She gives the origin of some of the more fabulous Hollywood Louella Parsons legends, and with glee describes their true basis. A woman of tremendous energy and enormous curiosity about life and the people who live it, she emerges from the pages of THE GAY ILLITERATE as very much more a person than the legends of Lollie Parsons would lead one to believe.

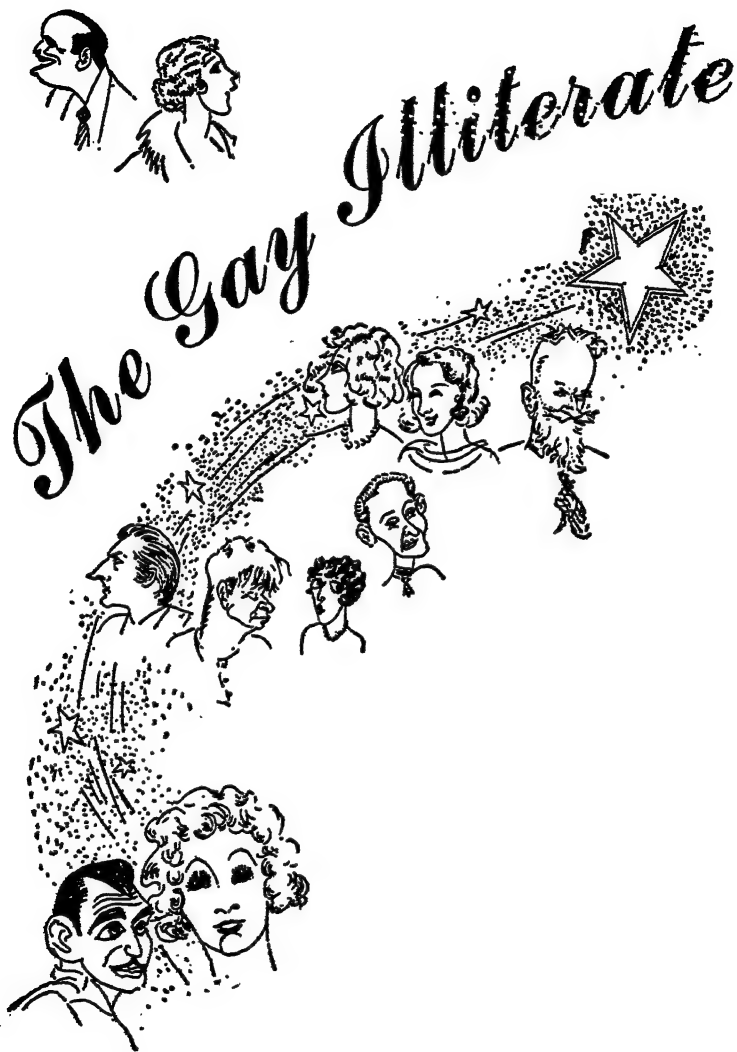
This story has not been serialized in any form prior to book publication.



The Gay Illiterate



LOUELLA O. PARSONS



Garden City 1944 New York

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN AND CO., INC.

**COPYRIGHT, 1944
BY LOUELLA O. PARSONS
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

**PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.
FIRST EDITION**

TO HARRY AND HARRIET

The Gay Illiterate

CHAPTER I

AFTER HALF A CENTURY on this earth (which is all I intend to admit to, being a firm believer in the school of thought that a woman who tells her age will tell anything) I am continually amazed by Louella O. Parsons. Both of them.

Now that I have arrived at the age where it is imperative to talk about myself, I find there is not a single ME—but two of us. There is the Louella O. Parsons of popular—or should I say unpopular—fable. And then there is me—the woman I live and work with and who is sometimes hurt, and sometimes fighting mad about the idea of the Lady Ogre Columnist who eats little actors alive.

I have been described—and perhaps too accurately for comfort—as a gay illiterate. There have been articles written about how I split infinitives with rare abandon and treat history with a gay disregard for dates and places. Some of these boners I admit to. Others are typographical errors. That's my story, and I am going to stick to it.

The story has always been the most important thing to me—and to Shakespeare! Let the King's English get in the way of the news, and the participles can dangle where they may—in the ruins along with the split infinitives.

For the thirty years I have been writing a newspaper column on motion pictures I have been too busy to build any false

illusions about my literary talents. If I have any particular style it is a form of "chatting" with my readers about the best known glamour personalities in the world. Such "chatting" has to be informal—as all the best gossip is, whether in a column or over the back fence. Once the reader accepts you as just another one of "us girls," how far your career may take you depends a lot on luck. There has been plenty of it connected with my "fabulous" career, and, if I say so "as shouldn't," there has also been an enormous amount of hard work.

I have written my column and news stories breaking from Hollywood on trains, in airplanes, on make-up kits in dressing rooms, on personal appearance tours, at the Santa Anita race track, and in the ladies' room at Ciro's. My day has no real beginning or ending. Barbara Stanwyck and Bob Taylor eloped right between the fish and entree courses when I was a guest at Constance Bennett's house. Anne Shirley and John Payne separated while I was in the middle of a gin rummy hand at Gracie Allen's home.

I have traveled three hundred and fifty miles to catch a preview of a big picture. Once I dictated my review from the men's room at a near-by gas station—it housed the only available telephone. Fortunately, I emerged before rumor could develop this into a scandal. The picture had received an even shorter review than it merited.

Myrna Loy and Arthur Hornblow separated for the first time while I was in the middle of my stage act in New York. I was forced to dictate my news story then and there, which entertained the paying customers no end. I never really know what I am going to do next, because I never know what my little chums in Wonderland are up to.

When times and tides are normal, I have a pattern for doing my column, surprising as that may sound. My day starts at

eight in the morning, but, since Hollywood is slower getting organized, I should say that my daily column is collected, sorted, and written in the three brief hours between ten in the morning and one-thirty in the afternoon, when my secretary files it on the teletype for newspapers throughout the world.

Three hours is not a great deal of time in which to turn out literary masterpieces. It grants quite a bit of rope for hanging oneself. Rewriting and polishing the column is practically impossible. And so, rather than disappoint word watchers at this late date, I promise to gaily split my infinitives and mix my metaphors as always.

My official office is in my Beverly Hills home. It is a pleasant place to work—in fact, it is my favorite room. The color scheme is maroon and blue. I have photographs on a table near my desk of my daughter, Harriet; her husband, King Kennedy; my husband, Dr. Harry Martin, who is now a Major in the United States Reserve Medical Corps; my boss, William Randolph Hearst; and an autographed sketch of George Bernard Shaw, which, as has been so painfully proven, is of no particular literary inspiration.

Visitors stepping into this room have often claimed an inability to see my pajama-clad form. This is by no means a deft compliment. I know my measurements far too clearly for such nonsense. What my guests mean is that my letters, papers, and desk debris constitute a more formidable mountain in front of a less formidable me. This, of course, is absurd. I am always able to catch a glimpse of my visitors.

Meanwhile, to make things more disconcerting, my two dogs, Molly and Patty Parsons, usually are somewhere underfoot, and in my hair I frequently find the Kitchen Menace, who wants to know what we are having for dinner, even as I talk over three telephones at once.

There are some magnificent rumors floating around that I have from fifteen to fifty "helpers" on my staff. Counting heads (and, even more important, salary checks), I have a secretary, June Marks, an assistant reviewer, Dorothy Manners, who claims I always take the best pictures, a "leg" man, Neil Rau, who gathers news, a girl reporter, Sara Hamilton, who covers the cafés, and a gal's best friend in triplicate—three telephones on my desk.

I talk over the phone for hours. It is a talent with me. When I am really busy I can keep these conversations fairly short—and must, because the phones ring constantly. I love to work under high pressure, this fact probably helping to keep my nerves from short-circuiting. The people who phone me during working hours range from my personal friends to avowed enemies, from conniving rats to purring cats. The good and the bad all come into my office, for better or for worse.

What to do with this vast assortment of tips and news items is my next headache. Half the time I am on a very definite spot, keeping a confidence about a potential divorce, marriage, blessed event, or contract ("Please don't print it yet, Louella"), then hearing it from another source almost immediately and knowing I may lose my scoop by keeping my word. Being both a friend and a reporter is no joke. I must be able to balance both elements in making my judgment. Apparently I do pretty well, because many stars and producers call me every day with "secrets" that can't be printed at the time.

When news is dull in Hollywood I find myself thinking about my bills, that I should go to the dentist, and how much I need a new hat with a red feather. Since all these subjects bore me, you can guess the state I am in on a bad day.

I am an abominable typist—but that does not keep me from pecking out at least half of what I write, preferring it to dictating. My daughter says that I am the only living white

woman who can make bows and arrows on a standard keyboard. In fact, I am afraid I'll lose my secretary to the Army Intelligence. Code-breaking should come easily after serving an apprenticeship under me. My assistants, indeed, from sheer necessity develop both a sixth sense and a fair knowledge of Braille.

The material for my column comes from visits on my part to the studios, news telephoned in, tips from friends, and from my pals, the press agents. I don't always like their press agent material. But I like every one of them. They are the hardest working boys in any business. Harry Brand, of 20th Century-Fox, is one of our closest friends; so is Howard Strickling of M.G.M.; also Perry Lieber, head of RKO publicity. I have always found that I can count on them and on George Brown of Paramount, John Joseph of Universal Studios, Alec Everlove of Warner Brothers, and while they may try to sell me on a story that I won't use, I know they'll never try the old Barnum and Bailey tactics of trying to get me to print stuff that insults my intelligence.

But the story that thrills my heart and gives me the greatest kick of all is a "scoop." I love them. I'm proud of my record, and I'm not going to pretend that I wouldn't fight for an important Hollywood story with every ounce of energy at my command.

2

When contemporaries want to be particularly churlish they invariably refer to me as "plump, pompous, gossip-writing Lolly Parsons." Being a woman, I accept the *plump* and pompous as insults. But what is wrong with gossip?

History is filled with facts and figures. But how do you suppose we would know about Anthony and Cleopatra or Louis and Du Barry if historians hadn't gossiped about them to their hearts' content?

As long as personalities make news it is natural to be interested in what makes them tick as human beings. I wasn't around when the good housewives of the Nile were chatting over the back dykes about Cleo and Anthony—or when the ladies of the French Court were embroidering the legend of Du Barry.

But I have lived in an era that has produced a whole industry of heroes and heroines to talk about and admire, to laugh about and cry over, to thrill to or weep for their weaknesses—the long parade of Movie Stars.

To my way of thinking, idols of the screen are nothing more nor less than fiction characters come to life. Golden Mary Pickford is as real to millions of people in her way as Cinderella. The magnificent extravagances of Gloria Swanson were the 20th Century version of the luxuries of a Graustarkian Queen. Little Mabel Normand's tragic life was a paper-back novel. Greta Garbo, in popular conception, is as remote as a lady Viking.

I've seen them come and go—from Valentino to Clark Gable—and I have spent thirty years as a chronicler of their lives *because people wanted to read about them!* I might have written reams of copy to my heart's content, but if there hadn't been an eager and interested market there would never have been such a thing as a Louella O. Parsons syndicated column. Gossip, like death and taxes, is with us to stay!

Looking back over my private evolution as a gossip writer, I believe that two factors have stood me in good stead—my health and my name. Louella, for instance, may mistakenly sound like a sentimental merger of two maiden aunts. The "O" is for Oettinger, my maiden name. The "Parsons" I acquired through marriage. Put them together and they may not be as exotic as Gypsy Rose Lee or as impelling as John D. Rockefeller, but—without putting too much stock in nu-

merology folderol—I do believe my name has been lucky for me.

Until a certain August 6th, in Freeport, Illinois, the day and place of my advent, my parents had been in a genteel war about my name. My father favored Sarah Louise, after his mother. Jeanette was the choice of my mother for the same reason. Hostilities were finally concluded when Mother, normally a very kindly person at heart, announced: "I am going to name the child after the first person who comes through that door."

A friendly Fate saved me from a name worse than Louella. I was exposed to Angie, Clorinda Jane, Lucretia, and Lena, all of whom were friends or relatives. But Louella Bixler visited Mother first, and—whether I liked it or not—there I was.

I suppose all children are imaginative and stretch the truth. I went considerably further. I was an incorrigible liar to the point where my family and teachers were worried and a present-day child psychiatrist would have been a nervous wreck.

Without the slightest pang of conscience I told strangers that my family was cruel to me. I insisted that I wasn't their child, having been left on their doorstep while still too young to do anything but kick about it. To me this seemed far more dramatic than the cold truth, which was that we were a devoted clan, my mother, stepfather, my brother, Edwin, and I. But as many a script writer has discovered in whipping up box-office hits for the Messrs. Cagney, Robinson, Raft, *et al.*—where is the "punch" in sweetness and light?

I was ten years old when I wrote my first story, what I modestly considered a beautiful and moving theme titled "The Flower Girl of New York." It seemed wholly irrelevant that I had never been to New York. I had my own ideas about

the Wicked City, and they were, to coin a phrase, really something. Once my masterpiece was completed, I wanted it published. So I took it to Dwight Breed, the editor of the *Freeport Journal-Standard*. "All right, Louella," he said, "we'll publish your story someday. Maybe after you are dead and gone it will live on after you."

Even to satisfy my budding literary ambition I didn't feel like dying to get in print—but an accident and an unforeseen piece of luck played into my hands.

I almost broke my neck!

Breaking your neck for a story, as far as I can learn, is newspaper legend rather than fact. But luck was with me, even at this tender age. With a pair of garden scissors in each hand I happily backed up to a hole in the hayloft and went plunging through—to authorship.

After the doctor had shut me up and started me on the road to recovery—I had broken a tooth, jagged a sizable cut in my chin, and fractured an elbow—I remembered what Mr. Breed had said about posterity and asked immediately if he could visit me.

Even now it seems I can hear the stairs creaking as I awaited the approach of the cagey, small-town editor toward my death chamber. He was a mighty good actor, himself. He paused in the doorway to let me get under way—and believe me, he was not disappointed.

I staged a deathbed scene that would do credit to Bette Davis, and to this day, sitting in a darkened projection room, I can favorably compare this poignant performance to those of some of our best actors.

"Louella," said my co-star, in deepest sympathy, "you had a terrible misfortune. Just in case you don't pull through, I want you to know your first story is published. We are printing 'The Flower Girl of New York' in the *Journal-Standard* tomorrow."

Later, I was to know the thrill of a newspaper scoop that was called, at the time, the biggest story ever to come out of Hollywood—the divorce of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. But never have I experienced a deeper, more abiding glow of satisfaction than in my first by-line on “The Flower Girl of New York.”

Three other short stories of mine saw the light of day in the *Daily Democrat*, a rival newspaper run by Charles Donahue. Glory and a by-line were the sole remuneration. I became commercial later.

I spent hours writing plays and acting them out with paper dolls that had been given Cousin Sarah Louise and me. Gentle “Sussie” was my best and most admiring audience.

It is common for most biographers to look back on the days of childhood as the happiest of their lives. I can’t truthfully say the same of myself. The sense of drama was too strong in me to permit me to enjoy the cramped opportunities of a juvenile.

I wanted to grow up as quickly as possible and to be hailed—if not as the best writer in America—at least as the youngest and the most beautiful. Toward this end I indulged in plagiarism at an early age and bodily lifted Frances Hodgson Burnett’s book, *Editha’s Burglar*, from between its covers onto my scratch-pad. I also reconstructed the plot of *Cousin Kate* from a show I saw in Chicago without bothering to mention the original author’s collaboration.

Cold reason forces me to admit that I was not my favorite little girl—either in or out of fiction.

3

The first person I ever cared deeply and sincerely about was—myself. I say that from the vantage point of experience, for

it takes time for other lives to root deeply into our own and for other people either to hurt us or to make us happy.

Youth is single-tracked, involved in its own problems and heartaches. I was conscious of my family—but not particularly as individuals. I was surrounded by warmth and tenderness and good care. We were not rich. But neither were we poor.

We Oettingers were like millions of Americans who sat on the front porch in the summertime with a pitcher of lemonade—and who, in the winter, held family court around the dining room table.

My mother, with her wide blue eyes and her dainty animation, is a far more colorfully etched person to me today than she was in the intimacy of our family life. I see her now as an indomitable personality, hiding a deep-rooted frustration for the theater and an innate love of drama under the cloak of a firm disciplinarian who thought all my beaux should go home by nine-thirty because "good people retire at that time."

I am sure she did not get this idea from her own mother, my adored grandmother, Jeanette Wilcox. In appearance my maternal grandmother resembled beloved May Robson, now gone. They had many characteristics in common—among them a firm belief that going to bed was a waste of time and energy. Grandma was an inveterate reader and consumer of gum drops. And despite a meager country school education she discussed any and all subjects fluently at the drop of a bonnet—or without it.

Of my own father, Joshua Oettinger, I have few memories. He was a delicate man, very ambitious, and he became a successful merchant. He died at the age of thirty-one, leaving my mother with two small children and ample money to take care of us. Like most women of her generation, she took much better care of us than of the money, which was soon dissipated.

Also, like most American families, we boasted a family

skeleton. Perhaps it would be more colorful to describe my grandfather on my father's side as a "cordial old Colonel"—but the truth is there was far more cordial *in* him than out. For many years the horrible example of Grandpa Oettinger was held up to me as a warning on the evils of hard liquor. Grandpa was married three times—with no divorces. His wives, tired perhaps of his addiction to the bottle, just lay down and died. He finally married his housekeeper.

But if the people of my immediate family were only sketchily important in my youth—I was not! Every casual emotion was a matter of tremendous moment. I was secretly convinced that no one felt things as deeply as I.

Because I was young and impatient for success, it hurt when my family laughed about my literary aspirations. Their cheerful scorn drove me to desperation. I was always mailing manuscripts—and getting them back with unflattering promptness.

I sometimes wish I were a souvenir-saver at heart and had some of those old stories. I have seen much worse movies. A "wronged girl" was usually the subject of my writings, and I was always violently on the side of "the Woman" in the case. This prejudice in favor of my own sex has followed me along my entire career. Not long ago that amazing phenomenon of the box office, Mickey Rooney, and his wife were on the verge of a divorce. I called Ava Gardner (Mrs. R.) to get her side of their difficulties, which—in spite of the war—were occupying considerable space in the daily papers.

To say that Ava was snippy is putting it mildly. She said she didn't see why she should unburden herself to me, since I had never been particularly nice about her career or about her. Yet when I wrote my story of their break for the Los Angeles *Examiner* I so subconsciously favored Ava that Mickey's pals accused me of being definitely on "her side"!

It annoys me exceedingly to hear other women say that they "simply don't get along with women," although it is implied that they are nine-day riots in male company. Certainly if any group of women in the world are supposed to be spoiled darlings and difficult to get along with it is the movie Queens. But I can frankly say that I have known few of them—and few other career women in my time—who didn't boast more than their share of those qualities of loyalty, square shooting, and straight thinking supposedly so exclusive to the masculine sex.

I suppose a psychiatrist might say that my stand for women might be a throwback to my own problems—those of a girl faced too soon with the responsibilities of marriage, motherhood, widowhood, and a livelihood to earn.

Yet I can truthfully say that, as I record the grand passions along the careers of the Lana Turners, I can see no point of similarity in the long string of freckle-faced beaux who were my escorts at high school parties. Nor in the many sob stories I have written of Hollywood divorces can I see any point of comparison with my own marriage—which was not a particularly happy one, but which I have never been able to look upon as a personal sob story.

4

I was sixteen years old when I first met John Parsons, and one year later I was married to him. My family had moved to Dixon, Illinois, from Freeport, and except for the slight change of locale and the fact that my mother had married again, our *status* was distinctly *quo*.

The passing of a handful of years had not dimmed my ambition to write, and by dint of refusing to take "No" for an

answer I had acquired a job on the *Dixon Star* during summer vacations.

I always carried a huge yellow notebook. I had an idea that a real reporter constantly jotted down notes, and I would far rather have been caught out without my lace-edged drawers than without my notebook! For the magnificent sum of five dollars weekly I covered musical events, wrote society notes, ran errands for the city editor, and learned something I have never since forgotten: NAMES make NEWS. A young man named Walter Winchell hasn't done badly following the same policy.

During odd moments while I was working on the *Star* I would congregate with the gang in Harnish's Candy Store, the local home of de luxe ice-cream sodas. It was here that I would occasionally glimpse a man whose very homeliness attracted me. Far from being tall, dark, and handsome, John Parsons had a medium build, sandy coloring, and unclassic features. His profile did *not* look as if the sculptor's chisel had lingered lovingly over it. But he had a way with the ladies and, in addition, a rich and indulgent father. He was decidedly the matrimonial "catch" of the small town of Dixon.

Oh, he had quite a reputation, had John. Besides being considered the most traveled man-about-town in Dixon—one who could even take New York in his stride—he also had the reputation for being the gayest blade.

I asked my mother: "Why has John Parsons a reputation for being so . . . well, *roué-ish*?" To which she whispered back: "THEY SAY he goes into saloons in broad daylight!"

That he also patronized ice-cream parlors in the daylight was more or less lost on me—because at this time I was madly in love with someone else.

The object of my adoration was a middle-aged Dixon doctor with a vast and flaming red mustache. Later, when I intro-

duced him to my cousin, Margaret, she whispered weakly, "That walking microbe catcher! How in the world did you ever fall for him?"

As usual, true love had run afoul of family disapproval. My mother forbade me to see the doctor, the briefest glimpse of whom, with his Technicolor mustache, set my heart to pounding. It was he—not I—who eventually decided that our "beautiful romance," which had never really existed, was all over. It was wonderful the way he stood up under my mother's mandate that he was out of my life forever.

Naturally, this great sorrow was too deep to discuss with fellow juveniles—so I cried my heart out on the shoulder of John Parsons. It must have been a very fancy bit of hamming. I chewed up the scenery sufficiently to impress him.

He pondered the situation for a while, then patted me on the shoulder. "Never mind, honey," he said absent-mindedly, "someday I'll marry you myself. Your mother is right. You don't want to fall in love with such an old man." John, I might add, was approximately the doctor's age.

"Mr. Parsons," as I always respectfully called him, even in my thoughts, was supposedly engaged to another girl, but something went wrong and he left for South Africa. I didn't see him for a year. And when he returned our meeting was just like something out of a movie. As the old silent subtitles used to say—*She was no longer a child.*

At least in my own mind, I wasn't. In my private opinion I had blossomed into glorious womanhood. John apparently shared this thought, for he said, just like the next subtitle in sequence, "Why, it's little Louella Oettinger. I can't believe it!"

I was hopelessly in love—again!

5

We were married on a bright, tangy fall day late in October. I wore a white silk, homemade dress trimmed with lace, and, for the first time in my life, my hair piled high on my head. Our parlor was banked with garlands of red and gold autumn leaves and bittersweet gathered from the banks of the lovely Rock River, where we had done so much of our courting during the summer months.

I can close my eyes now and see the attractive red berries among the leaves. But that bittersweet had no fragrance. It was symbolic, I think, of my married life. I was far too much in love with my husband and let him know it.

Mature men may be charmed by youth, inspired by it, or emotionally wrecked by it. But they seldom find it comfortable to live with—after the first year.

John's business affairs, consisting mostly of the management of his grandfather's estate, took him to Burlington, Iowa, and I preened along at his side, an eighteen-year-old matron, at once a pet and a problem to him.

We set up housekeeping in a genteel boardinghouse presided over and dominated by the Misses Nannie and Sally Browning, for the uninvolved reason, I am sure, that my husband thought me incapable of managing my own establishment.

But he was indulgent with me, and proud, I think, of the way I looked in my fluffy and befrilled trousseau. For five beautiful months we were very happy.

I had not yet begun to annoy him when, at Christmastime, I hung up a large red stocking. And the flush of embarrassment had not yet begun to color his face when he brought business friends home to dinner, and I suggested playing

"Follow the Leader" or some word-guessing contest. I had picked the wrong town for such games. Later I discovered they were popular in Hollywood but never in Burlington.

I sometimes think of this small town, with its Midwest drab grayness, as though it were an outpost of darkest Siberia. Perhaps that sounds like a harsh indictment. I am sure it was—and is—no different from any other small town; but we remember places by the happiness or unhappiness we have felt there. I was young and homesick for my family in Dixon—and it is the memory of my misery that persists, not the reality.

In spite of the naïve and somewhat pixie quality of my youth, I was not stupid. It did not take me long to realize that I was guilty of the unforgivable marital sin of boring my husband. Because I loved him I tried to grow up, swallow life in big chunks, and become an adult in a hurry.

John aided and abetted the one-sided struggle by putting good books in my hands that otherwise might have escaped me. He knew of my ambition to write and urged me to study Thomas Hardy, who, he opined, was the best writer in English literature. Unfortunately, the exposure didn't take. Nothing of the Hardy style has ever seeped through my pronouncements.

Even the knowledge of approaching motherhood did not give our marriage the stability this happy event is supposed to induce. From the time I knew I was going to have a baby I hoped it would be a girl. John wanted a boy. Even in the adventurous throes of impending parenthood we could not meet on a common ground.

I am always fascinated by idealistic articles dealing with the thoughts of young mothers-to-be. It appears they are always thinking about or looking at lovely things in the realm of Mother Nature. If prenatal influence is what it is supposed to be I cannot understand why most babies are not born with

little garlands of flowers around their necks—like winning race horses.

In my case it seems that my entire accouchement was spent staring at a particularly hideous painting which hung malevolently over the fireplace in a house John had rented from a Mrs. Laura Delano. Whether or not she was one of the *First Family* Delanos, I do not know. But I do know she was the possessor of the world's most hideous oil painting.

It depressed me so much that I finally took it down and relegated it to a lesser spot over a radiator in the hallway. This sacrilege was duly noted and reported to Mrs. Delano via cable (she was then traveling in Europe) by a neighbor. Within twenty-four hours, I received a cable reading: "RE-MOVE OIL PAINTING FROM RADIATOR IMMEDIATELY. DELANO."

So I moved the picture back to its original place of horror and continued to stare at it until Harriet was born. She has never manifested any Daliesque leanings—or even a particular talent for picture hanging—so I am still dubious about the effects of prenatal influence.

After the birth of Harriet I was more miserable than ever in Burlington—but with a difference. My attitude toward my loneliness and heartsickness was no longer neutral—now I was determined to do something about those twin demons of the spirit. If my marriage was not a happy one—it was still not the end of the world. There was a great deal of life to be lived—and I wanted to live it. My "stakes" were my adored daughter, my health, and some pin money. It was enough.

Out of the blue, one day, I told John I wanted to take the baby and go to Missoula, Montana, to visit an uncle I hadn't seen in years—and I went.

That marked the beginning of the end of our marriage. From there we just drifted apart, lulled into an acceptance of

the situation by sheer necessity. Looking back on the years, I realize now that whatever seemed like shortcomings in a husband, to an eighteen-year-old girl, were more than erased by his splendid record in the first World War. He wrote many beautiful letters when he was hospitalized in St. Nazaire for months, promising that when he came back he would see if we could not reach a basis of understanding.

But we were never granted that chance. Captain John Parsons died aboard a boat due to dock in New York on February 14, 1919.

Who ever really "understands" what goes wrong with a marriage? Certainly not the principal actors.

CHAPTER II

YOU EITHER LOVE CHICAGO—or else it burns in your memory as a blustering, blistering subdivision of Hell. I love it. It is my type of town. I have known a deeper thrill turning onto Michigan Boulevard than I have ever felt from the spacious, tree-lined Champs Elysées, the formal roar of Trafalgar Square, the dizzily perpendicular Nob Hill, or even the electric clang of Forty-second Street and Broadway.

Chicago is gusty and unafraid—and I needed courage to meet its exciting challenge when I first came there with Harriet a baby in my arms, in the supercharged days before 1914.

My first job I landed through a newspaper "ad"—an indeterminate position with a stereopticon company at \$10 a week. My chief chore seemed to be playing flunky to the boss's little blonde secretary—an institution which did not

originate in Hollywood, although it has attained great popularity here.

While they carried on, in secluded moments, what is politely referred to as an "affair," I carried on in a little effort of my own toward buying shoes for Harriet. Years later, in Agua Caliente, I saw a Hollywood producer put down \$1000 and plead with the dice to "buy baby some new shoes." The phrase is excellent crapshooter's lingo. But it has never struck me as funny. Even after all these years, the idea of "buying shoes for baby" sends a cold little chill through my heart.

I had been keeping an eye on the Chicago newspapers, hoping for an opening somewhere, and finally, at the loss of a dollar per week, one materialized on the Chicago *Tribune*. It was good to be near the smell of printer's ink again, and with one brief exception I never wandered away. I worked in the syndicate department, where I was fortunate enough to be under the guiding eye of William L. Handy, who later became publisher of the Chicago *Herald*.

Handy was a curious man, shy and self-effacing, and his clothes hung so loosely that he was accused (behind his back) of buying his wardrobe at Lane Bryant, a maternity house. But in his way he was a genius. It was he who first started the Sunday supplement and most of the special features found in today's Sunday papers.

Always in the back of my mind, from the moment I had reached Chicago, was the hope that I might eventually work in one of the brand-new movie companies there. In Burlington I had seen a flickery film called *The Great Train Robbery*. Later I had seen movies of the funeral of King Edward VII. The film industry was just shaking loose from its monopoly suits; and while I cannot truthfully say I foresaw the great thing it was to become, I was intrigued with this new entertainment medium.

Life has presented me with many jigsaw puzzles, but never a stranger one than the fact that while I was being miserable and wretched in Burlington, the then juvenile pirates from the cloak-and-suit, gloves-and-socks businesses, were unknowingly pushing and shoving and patenting themselves—and me—into a new world.

The two important companies in Chicago were the Essanay and the Selig Studios. But the surprising “quick money” of the early flickers had isolated the head men even in those days, and it was just about as difficult to get an interview with one of the bigwigs then as it is now.

Strangely enough, my “break” at the movie companies came quite accidentally. My younger cousin, Margaret, was very friendly with a little girl of twelve named Ruth Helms. Ruth later was to marry and divorce Conrad Nagel and then to wed Sidney Franklin, one of Hollywood’s top producers and directors today.

I used to like to try out my literary masterpieces on the girls—and there was one yarn that particularly intrigued Ruth. It was called *Chains* and was based on the tragic trial of a nineteen-year-old boy who killed a bartender in a drunken brawl. The boy’s mother and sweetheart came to Dixon for the trial, which was the first murder I had ever covered. Trying to comfort the girl when her lover was sentenced to twenty-six years at hard labor, I won her confidence. When she married him the day he was taken to Joliet, I was a witness at the ceremony. Not only did I scoop the other two Dixon newspapers, but a Chicago newspaper reprinted my story, making my happiness complete.

Ruth Helms liked my dramatization of the story so much that she went about getting it sold. Her mother was Mrs. George K. Spoor’s closest friend, and Spoor was the “Ess” in Essanay. Ruth hounded poor Mrs. Spoor so unmercifully that

she, in turn, hounded her busy husband into giving me an appointment.

Spoor bought *Chains* for \$25, and later it reached the screen, starring Essanay's hottest male bet, Francis X. Bushman.

Imagine Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer buying a \$25 story for Clark Gable today—or 20th Century-Fox paying such an amount for a yarn for Tyrone Power! But those were the good old days before studios wrote out \$100,000 checks for books and plays. I sometimes wonder who is crazy—the old-timers or the new-timers—but that is beside the point.

In addition to buying my story, Spoor put me on, at the magnificent salary of \$20 per week, reading manuscripts and writing scenarios. Manuscripts came in on pencil tablets, torn envelopes, and even on bits of wallpaper. Twenty-five dollars was considered a good price for a story, and I almost lost my job when I sent Rupert Hughes the unprecedented sum of \$75 for one of his most dramatic scenarios.

Today, in Hollywood, movie directors are treated like heirs to the throne, and in the majority of cases they are far more temperamental than supposedly firebrand stars. But Essanay went in for no such coddling.

On my desk was a row of boxes, each bearing the name of a director. I would distribute the stories I bought indiscriminately down the line, and the directors made the stories I selected whether they liked them or not. Most of the time they didn't like them!

The most outspoken of my critics was E. Mason Hopper (Lightning Hopper). His nickname was derived from sketches he made in a flash on the vaudeville stage. He would proclaim to the high heavens—or to anybody else who would listen—that I wouldn't know a good story if one bit me and

that everybody's life would be happier if I would take up some other career.

One day Hopper completely astounded me. Eureka and egad, I had found a comedy he liked! He told his equally astounded associates that perhaps he had misjudged me. And so enthusiastic was he over my selection that within one week he had completed the movie, looked at it, and found it superlative! Decidedly it must have been a super production, for over two thousand dollars was spent in its making!

And then IT happened!

We were in a projection room looking at the latest pictures of our rivals, Vitagraph, Biograph, Edison, Lubin, Kalem, Kleine, and Selig, unfold on the screen at what would now be called a preview. The first two or three films were routine enough, but the next one was a Vitagraph production using the very same story, the very same title, and the very same *everything* which I had bought and which Hopper had so magnificently produced at that terrific budget!

Merciful numbness poured over me, and I was hardly conscious when the lights went up in the projection room and I felt Spoor locating me with fiercely burning eyes. "I'll see you in my office in the morning," he snapped and stamped ominously out, followed by his cohorts. The last to leave was E. Mason Hopper, whose face was darker than a current blackout.

I couldn't sleep all night. I was fifteen minutes early in Spoor's office the following morning and died all over again with each passing moment. Finally, he came in, scarcely speaking as he sat down. His secretary broke the silence from the doorway. "That story that Parsons bought for Hopper," she announced, "was copied from a Street and Smith magazine. They are threatening to sue unless you pay for the film rights."

Spoor glared at me. "Where did you get that story?" he

thundered. I told him I had bought it from a woman in Waukegan, at which he was doubly horrified, Waukegan being his home town as well as that of a young party known as Jack Benny.

"Find the author and have her brought here," he roared, outraged that anyone could do this to a home town boy.

Further action was fortunately delayed until they located the author. Once again Spoor sent for me—and never shall I forget the tableau when Spoor and I turned toward the door as our "authoress" appeared, escorted by her husband.

A little old lady with a bonnet tied under her chin, looking enough like Whistler's mother to give even him a turn, smiled sweetly at us, with an expression as innocent as a baby's.

"Did you sell Miss Parsons this story?" Spoor demanded, chewing a cigar.

"I certainly did," she piped.

"Did you sell the same one to Vitagraph?"

"Yes, indeed," she admitted cheerfully.

Spoor gulped at her surprising candor. "Where did you get it?"

"Oh," said our wide-eyed heroine, "out of a magazine. And I have lots more of them if you are interested."

Her complete innocence left Spoor with a shredded cigar and a shattered investment. He felt he could do nothing more than forget the whole thing, charging the \$2000 off to profit and loss—and experience!

2

These were great days—hard work but fun. Sometimes I would bring furniture from my apartment to help "dress" the movie sets, and now and then, when the company was caught short of actors, I would play a bit role. There was a wonder-

ful feeling of camaraderie, and Essanay should have weathered the storms and remained to this day one of the important film companies.

But George Spoor lacked the vision he needed to scale the greater heights. He scoffed loudly at Adolph Zukor, just beginning to be a name in the infant industry, because he had bought a *seven-reel* movie made in England. "People are not interested in long pictures," he said. "They want the one-reelers with quick, peppy action."

With such an attitude, Spoor was sealing his own doom. He didn't know it, and I didn't. But looking back, I can see where he missed the boat so often.

He could have had Mary Pickford under contract at one time for a mere \$55 per week! Mary's mother, Mrs. Charlotte Pickford, brought her to Spoor for an interview, but they haggled over a few dollars. His top price was \$45, and he wouldn't go a cent higher. Charlotte, one of the shrewdest businesswomen of all time, said a loud "No"—and a few years later her curly-headed daughter was signed for the astounding, astronomical sum of \$10,000 a week—by another company.

Spoor did, however, recognize screen personalities when he saw them, and if he could get them at his own figure he signed and developed them. Many became famous. Gloria Swanson, at the age of sixteen, came directly from high school to take a job in the studio. She played in the "Swedie" comedies with Wallace Beery, with whom she was madly, head over heels in love.

Gloria was a scrawny little thing with enormous ice-water-blue eyes and a head that seemed too big for her petite body. Certainly she gave little indication of the sleek, groomed mannequin she was later to become under the magic of Cecil De Mille's guidance. But Wally Beery couldn't see her for dust.

He spent most of his time dodging around sets or trying to

sneak down to the corner drugstore to eat his lunch—minus the ever-lovin' Gloria, who had marked him for her own.

Perhaps this highly comical and ill-fated romance might never have reached the state of holy matrimony if Wally had not misjudged his step in a movie scene. He was supposed to jump off the top of a building into a fireman's net, and, instead, landed on the cold, hard ground. Gloria, who had watched the near-demise of her beloved with horrified eyes, ran to his prostrate figure and threw herself across him, sobbing: "He's dead! He's dead!"

"No, I'm not," moaned Wally, feeling himself tenderly, "but I oughta be." He was rushed to the hospital, where he couldn't get away, for a period of recuperation, and it was under these ideal circumstances that Gloria literally "got her man." Several months later, when Wally left for Hollywood on a new contract, he and Gloria were formally engaged.

Essanay boasted the luxury of one office boy who was continually on the brink of being fired—only no one ever quite got around to it. For months I knew him only as "Ben." He was cross-eyed and homely, and the superstition of theatrical folk (they think crossed eyes a lucky omen) did far more to keep Ben's job than his eager, running legs.

One day Ben confided to me his ambition to become an actor. He seemed rather pitiful, the little cross-eyed man of thirty-odd, talking about his dreams. "I know I could never play heroes," he said, "but I think I could do comedy pretty well."

I was busy and only half listening. "Oh, forget it, Ben," I advised. He said, "Yes'm," and started to back out the door.

"By the way," I asked, "what's your last name, Ben?"

"Turpin," he replied. "Ben Turpin."

3

Our pride and joy at Essanay—and at the same time our biggest pain in the neck—was our great lover, Francis X. Bushman. Bushman was to feminine admirers then what a combination of Clark Gable and Charles Boyer would be now. His classic profile and wavy locks literally drove the girls into a frenzy.

But our idol not only had feet of clay—he had five children—and if he had been afflicted with five serpents it would not have been more of a handicap in a publicity way.

Spoor nearly went out of his mind keeping the fact from the palpitating fans that his Adonis had “begat” five offspring, and it was a hush-hush job that required a bit of doing, believe me.

Spoor was always looking for romantic and tricky ways of furthering Bushman’s popularity, and since the star’s mail was growing to astounding proportions I had a bright idea: Why not launch a new department, answer all the letters under Bushman’s faked signature, and thus lend the personal *pièce de résistance* to our idol’s personality?

It was a good idea—but like many other noble experiments it came a cropper through tragic overzealousness. One of the three stenographers Spoor had hired to write Frank’s letters took her job so much to heart that, unknown to anyone in authority, she was writing ardent, fiery love letters to his fans!

It was the beginning of the end for Bushman when, one fine spring morning, one of his adoring females presented herself at the studio arrayed in bridal finery even down to a bouquet and all set to marry him. Hell and high water couldn’t keep her from her “soul mate,” and when it had to be revealed

that he couldn't marry her because he was already a benedict (and how!) the jig was up.

The ensuing "family man" publicity ruined Bushman's career. He never lived down the sensational "exposé" that he was the father of five, and later, when he was divorced by his wife and married his leading lady, Beverly Bayne, the disillusioned fans had turned to other heroes.

Poor Frank! He was the victim of accident and the mistaken idea that all of the people can be fooled all of the time. But if it is any satisfaction to him, he paved the way for the honesty of today's publicity system. The whole world knows that Bing Crosby has four husky sons and that Don Ameche has a household full of junior Ameches. No current romantic idol would think of trying to hide his family. But I wonder how many of them realize that they owe their publicity freedom to a forgotten idol who gave his career to the cause?

4

Those were the days before the war—lush, rowdy, and filled to overbrimming with excitement. The world was my oyster, and Chicago was providing the cocktail sauce. Even my *Dulcy* antics at Essanay couldn't keep me from being supremely happy.

My days were fabulous and hard-working at the studio. I had Harriet to come home to at night, and she was a source of never-ending joy. I had found a Godsend in a middle-aged, white-haired, pink-cheeked Englishwoman named Mrs. Jennie Mattocks, who came to live with us and to take care of my child. We called her "Mattie," teased her fondly about her Cockneyisms ("Urry, 'Arriet"), and grew to love her as if she were our own flesh and blood. I think she adored Harriet as much as I did and kept even a stricter eye on her.

Harriet was more than the big incentive of my life—she *was* my life. I wanted to give her everything—the best in education, clothes, friends, the right background. Without her I am afraid I would not have tried too hard to amount to much. Left to my own devices, I find I get too much pleasure and happiness from too little. But for my little girl—the best was not good enough.

Harriet was a well-behaved little child, or as well behaved as a little girl is expected to be at five or six. But she did have her moments.

One day I arrived home to find the apartment literally abloom with flowers. I stared in complete astonishment, unable to think of any admirer of sufficient affluence to say it with roses. "Who sent these?" I asked Mattie.

She looked embarrassed and kept her eyes steadily turned from a small figure standing in a corner, unduly inconspicuous.

"They're from me," came from the immovable figure.

"From you?" I *was* surprised. "Where did you get them?"

Before she could answer I gazed again at the various bouquets and noticed an arrangement suspiciously wreath-like.

"You won't spank me?" bargained my Pride and Joy.

I said I wouldn't.

"Well," she sighed, "they're from the cemetery. But I didn't pick them. Tommy did! I knew you wouldn't like ME to do it—even for you."

I am sure my small daughter had no intuitive powers, but the cold fact remains that while her funereal offerings were still fresh in the apartment I got my walking papers from Esanay.

My downfall was an Efficiency Man—the Waterloo of better men—and women—before and since. Like most of his breed, he attempted first to make a studio stool pigeon of me, trying to find out gossip about the stars: who was going with whom;

and, more important, who was spending money on whom. When I refused to play ball, diplomatic relations were, to put it politely, severed.

Luckily, I saw it coming, so I cushioned the fall with a job—but fast—on the *Chicago Record-Herald*. By force of considerable sales pressure, I sold the editors on the idea of running a series of articles on “How to Write for the Movies” for twenty-five big, beautiful dollars a week. And so potent was the sound of “big money” that I also talked the A. C. McClurg publishing company into the idea of publishing a book I had up my sleeve on the same subject.

Heaven knows how or why—but McClurg brought out my brain child in 1915, and to this day its only merit is that it happened to be the first of its kind on the market. To my everlasting shame, I learned that it was used as a textbook at the University of Chicago; and to the poor students who attempted to follow my rules to scenario success go my heartiest apologies.

The quick sale of the scenario-writing column idea and the subsequent appearance of my book started the germ of an idea in my mind. If a large percentage of people were interested in the “behind the scenes” of picture making, how many millions more must be interested in the personalities “up front”—the stars, players, and directors who were beginning to bring Joe Public and the Missus in droves to the box offices? Instead of a scenario column why not one about the studios and the private life doings of the movie players?

Mae Tinee, on the rival *Tribune*, was successfully by-lining a column merely reviewing pictures. Why couldn't the *Herald*—with me, of course—go a step further and branch off into bits of gossip? At least it was worth a try. Newspaper editors no longer frightened me. Wasn't I an “authoress” with a published book?

“How about a movie gossip column?” I asked Bill Handy,

who had come over to the *Herald* from the *Tribune*. "Gossip about the movie stars," I amplified, "what they are like off the screen, whom they go with, and what they wear."

Handy, who loved new ideas far more than he ever could a blood relative, didn't appear excited over my brain child. But he did say: "We'll try it. Might go. Use your by-line, and we will start you on it at \$45 a week!"

If I had found close proximity to the glamorous men and women of the Essanay Company exciting and different I was now in a nice little Seventh Heaven as a newspaperwoman covering the movie "beat." No longer did I have to be nice to the spoiled darlings of the sets and the front offices. They had to be nice to me. Ah, the power of the press was never sweeter!

My days became as a cage full of waltzing mice. I was as familiar a figure meeting trains through Chicago as any red-cap. I spent my lunch hours gossiping at the best hotels with happy and unhappy commuters to and from Hollywood—Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Mae Marsh, D. W. Griffith, Mary Pickford, Dorothy Dalton, Thomas Ince, C. B. De Mille, lovable little Mabel Normand, Mack Sennett, and hundreds of others less celebrated.

"Corny" is perhaps the word for those first movie columns of mine—but luckily no one had heard of the expression then. I had stock phrases dear to my heart. Lillian Gish was always "Lily-like Lillian." The great D.W. was invariably "the master." Mary Pickford fell into a rut on my typewriter as the "golden child." Impish little Dorothy Gish was persistently a "tomboy."

But I had my moments of crusading, too. The movies were growing important, and they became almost a national issue overnight with the release of the first really great movie, *The Birth of a Nation*.

Everyone now thinks of this classic as one of the landmarks

of the industry—but no masterpiece was ever launched under stormier circumstances. Race riots greeted the first showing of the film, flaring up like brush fires—particularly in Chicago. The *Herald*, my paper, was violently anti-Griffith at the behest of James Keeley, the owner. He ran editorial after editorial condemning D. W. for ever producing such a troublemaking film.

It was a terrible spot for me. I had seen the wonderful picture and was completely on Griffith's side. Finally, I bearded Keeley in his den and begged him at least to look at the film before he continued his attack, which was threatening to result in the banning of *Birth of a Nation* in Chicago theaters.

Meanwhile the censors had taken up the bitter battle, and there was nothing for Griffith to do but to take his case to court. I was one of his many "expert" witnesses—I might add with Keeley's permission after he eventually saw the movie and was won over to D. W.'s side. It was the beginning of a long friendship with a man I believe to be one of the greatest geniuses, if not the greatest, the industry has ever produced.

Griffith was hard. A taskmaster. But he believed in the medium of the screen with his heart, and he made his pictures breathe with the power of his faith. Few people knew him well or ever became close to him. Even the girl who loved him deeply for years called him "Mr. Griffith" with timidity and respect. And Griffith, in his solitary isolation of the true artist's heart, gave the world such classics as *Broken Blossoms*, *The Heart of the World*, and *Intolerance*.

5

Chicago life was as glamorous with great newspaper "names" then as it was with the first darlings of the movies. The *Herald* boasted some of the great reporters of the day on its staff.

Jack Lait was one of them, though in those days Jack little dreamed that he was to become one of the great newspapermen of the century. The late Billy De Beck was there, too, later creating the lovable Barney Google and other famous cartoon characters. At another desk worked a rival of De Beck's, Frank Willard, whose Moon Mullins has given the sad old world many a needed laugh. Loretta King, now Kate Cameron, of the New York *Daily News*, was my secretary. Her sister, Mary King, now Mrs. Joseph Patterson, was always my champion.

Ben Hecht was also very much in the newspaper scene, a star reporter on the Chicago *Daily News*, though he had not yet taken to his large black hat and flowing ties. Before Ben developed a violent hatred of anything valued over \$5 (except the royalties from his plays and what he is paid on a despised movie contract, of course) I always considered him an inconspicuous but ambitious man who was just as anxious to turn an honest penny as the next one. I know he will hate it—but I thought today's fiery critic of things en masse a rather sweet guy! I've often felt the ingrown disposition he acquired with success was merely an adornment—like the black hat he wears.

My office at the *Herald* was shared with Félix Borowski, the music critic, and Richard Henry Little, the star writer on the paper. There was a man! Tall, indolently charming, and brilliant, he was a newspaperman in the best movie traditions—even to his slouchy, untidy appearance—and though he did not carry a bottle on his hip, à la the cinema, he was never known to turn down a drink with a congenial companion.

We were all vastly impressed with Dick's social standing. He was a frequent diner at the home of such socialites as Mrs. Kellogg Fairbank—and, just so that he would never be

caught short on an invitation, Dick kept his dinner clothes in his desk drawer!

Frequently when I was working away on a movie piece, he would say grandly, "You will have to step outside, my sweet. I am about to change my pants."

Or he would rib me about my movie idols. "What has the Lily-like Lillian got to give to the waiting world today?" he would jibe, or, "Griffith has a great deal to learn. I wish I had time to teach him."

But his favorite among my interview subjects was Theda Bara, and he made me tell again and again about my unforgettable meeting with the first "oomph girl" of them all.

Head and bare shoulders above all vamps of prewar No. 1 was Theda Bara, originally born Theodosia Goodman, of Cleveland, Ohio. Theda was later revealed to be a home-loving, tender-hearted Jewess with an appetite for corned beef and cabbage, and a homespun soul. But in those days she was the original mystery woman. Greta Garbo is an out-and-out flagpole sitter compared to Theda—or rather to the act put on by Theda—and the old Fox company.

The charmer from the land of the Sphinx did not grant many interviews, so it was with a feeling that we had been admitted to royal chambers that Mae Tinee of the *Chicago Tribune*, William Hollander of the *Daily News*, and I were told by a Fox publicity man that we might meet Miss Bara (Arab spelled backward) in "the flesh."

The day was hotter than the proverbial hinges of the proverbial hot spot. We dripped little beads of perspiration in anticipation as we waited in an anteroom in Theda's hotel suite at the Blackstone for the summons to the "presence."

Hollander had just voiced the opinion that it was so hot the Vamp had probably melted into her own eyelash goo when

the press agent appeared in our midst and said: "Miss Bara will be a moment longer. She is not yet acclimated to this Northern weather!"

No more were the words out of his mouth than the door of an adjoining room began to open noiselessly and seemingly without the aid of human hands—and there, exposed to us in unbelievable splendor, sat the Queen of the sirens draped to the teeth in magnificent furs.

"Miss Bara," declaimed the press agent in the manner of a circus barker, "was born in the shadow of the Sphinx, you know. It is very, very hot, and she is cold!"

It was an interview to go down in the annals, and Mae and Bill and I did the best we could to make it immortal on our typewriters. Bara didn't talk—she merely grunted. She looked as ineffably bored as we felt. Finally, and probably because she couldn't stand the furs any longer, she gave a wave of her hand, dismissing us, and we left the shuttered, smoldering room gasping for fresh air and a chance to howl our lungs out.

Dick Little, our dramatic critic, picked up the Bara catch phrase, "It is very, very, very warm in Africa," and used it profusely—particularly when a bit of the flush from the bottle that cheers had colored his own face. "Well," he would philosophize, "you know how it is in Africa."

Don't ever let anybody tell you that newspapermen are all hard shell and no heart. When it finally was decided like a bolt from the blue that "Little Orphan Parsons" was going to be blown to a trip to New York on an expense account there wasn't a wolf in the office who didn't come up with good advice about how to dodge the wolves in New York! (Only we didn't call them wolves then. They were "mashers"!)

It was Keeley, the boss, who decided that a trip to the New York scene would be good for the column's prestige. It was

going well with the Chicago reading public, and he felt I should increase my contacts by taking a look at the big town. Keeley was faced with the terrific job of competing with himself on the *Herald*—for his ideas before he left the rival *Tribune* had made it what it was! Later he had brought over William Handy from the *Tribune* and made him publisher of the *Herald*. And day after day these two brilliant newspapermen sweat beads of agony worrying about the marvelous features they had created—and left behind—on the *Tribune*!

No junior deb about to be launched before her first stag line was ever more excited than I was about that first trip to New York. For years I had dreamed about New York, written about it, even described places there I had never seen. And now I was going to be exposed to it—or, as Dick Little said, “it to Parsons!”

Why I wasn’t decapitated gawking out of the taxi window as I was joggled to the Astor Hotel I’ll never know. When I stepped into the marble lobby and saw the rushing, hurrying crowd, I felt I had at last come into my own. Always the ham at heart, I felt every eye in the place was on me as I registered: “Miss Louella Parsons, columnist, Chicago, Ill.”

One of the main purposes of my visit was to cover the Motion Picture Ball, and toward this happy event Handy had hinted that I might charge a gown to my expense account. He had said: “If you are as resourceful as I think you are, you’ll hide it so I can’t tell whether the hotel or the train paid for your dress!”

With shudders of apprehension I blew \$35 for a black dress that I considered a symphony of sophistication and gaily charged it to “room service”!

I’ll never forget that black dress—because later, after the wondrous movie ball, it was the inspiration for the first *faux pas* I ever heard uttered by a movie producer who has since

become famous for them. He asked me if I had attended the ball, and I replied that I had, indeed. "Solomon in all his glory had nothing on me," I said. "Solomon?" he mused and then turned to his wife. "The Solomons, dear," he puzzled; "do we know any movie people named *Solomon*?"

Another highlight of my New York jaunt was meeting Lewis J. Selznick, the producer-father of Myron and David Selznick. When I interviewed the great Selznick at his home, David was wearing knee pants—but he had a grown-up point of view. He proceeded to tell his father, in front of me, just how bad he thought his last film was. "See?" said the proud L. J., "he already knows his movies." But I doubt if even his doting father knew how very well indeed the embryo producer of *Gone with the Wind* knew his movies.

The New York visit was a wonderful whirl with beautiful, vivacious Alice Brady, Montague Love, Olive Tell, and other habitués of the old Fort Lee Studio. How I loved Alice! Sparkling, gay, animated as a butterfly, she flitted from one conversational subject to another. Her father, William A. Brady, who worshiped the ground she walked on, would yell at her: "For God's sake, Alice, be quiet for a few minutes"—but she never paid any attention. "If women didn't talk about nothing," she would say, "men would never get time to concentrate on something important!"

Alice went down to the train with me when I started back to Chicago, and I almost wept for leaving such good times behind. "Oh, you'll be back," she said blithely, "no one ever comes to New York just once!"

She didn't know then how prophetically she spoke. And neither did I—or I would have been worried sick.

I hadn't been back in my office at the *Herald* an hour before I realized something was seriously wrong. My pals listened to my gay recountings of my New York adventures with scant

attention—for their minds were on the alarming rumor that the *Herald* was “going under.”

What had been long feared had come to pass: James Keeley had given his best ideas to the *Tribune*. Handy, never a businessman, was beginning to find it out. And so, two days after I returned from my poor little personal triumph, our paper went over to the Chicago *Examiner*, one of the extensive Hearst holdings. There had been rumors of this before—but Keeley had always denied them, even to his good friend, Richard Henry Little.

At last the blow fell. Over the Associated Press came verification of the bad news. Like slow death the word spread that the paper would cease publication the next day.

Dick and I heard the news in our cubbyhole of an office, staring out on the wet Chicago streets that seemed ironically to be reflecting our own gloom.

Suddenly, and without warning, my gay little applegart was upset and all I had worked for was irrevocably lost. Where could I get another job? Where could I turn? What about my bright plans for Harriet?

As we stood looking down into the rain-swept street a lone milkwagon slushed across our vision.

“Look here, kid,” Dick said after a moment, “see that milkman? Well, go take *his* job—do any damned thing, but don’t ever work for Hearst!”

CHAPTER III

SO MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN of my long association with William Randolph Hearst—so much that is fantasy and

so little that is fact—that I am afraid the unvarnished truth must fall flat.

Many of the rumors and even printed stories have been frankly libelous. But they have been too ridiculous to dignify by legal suits.

The most popular and widely spread is that I am supposed to know "something." This fictional "something" varies in style from the Edgar Allan Poe school to the Boccaccio trend, according to the rumor-monger's literary preferences. Then there is the more pallid rumor that I was originally hired as a press agent for Hearst's motion-picture enterprises.

Time, I am thankful to say, has dimmed some of the more absurd stories. It is heartbreaking, to say the least, after working for twenty-five years getting scoops and important motion-picture news stories, in addition to writing daily and Sunday columns, to find oneself suspected of holding such a major appointment through even the cagiest blackmail scheme.

I have often wished the true story of William Randolph Hearst could be written. The book by Mrs. Fremont Older is well done—but it is too saccharine a picture of a man whose robust and vital personality has long swayed the opinions of this country. **BUNK**

Hearst is not always right in his analysis, but he is always ruthlessly honest in his own opinions. And no man can say William Randolph Hearst has ever championed a cause he did not sincerely believe in. **MORE BUNK**

Many a thing has been charged to him that should rightly have been laid at the door of one of his editors. No organization as big as the Hearst newspaper and magazine publications is without its politicians. Some of them have fooled him for a little while—but not for long. He has a more personal grasp on everything that goes on within his official family than any other publisher has ever had. And where he has found men

exploiting him to further their own interests—heads have fallen.

He has made important enemies. He has also made deeply loyal friends—and I am proud to count myself as one of them.

In the darkest hour of my life he proved himself a friend to me beyond measure—but that is a story for later on.

2

I did not go over to the Hearst organization with the sale of the *Chicago Herald*. In my anxiety and heartsickness over losing my job, I *did* approach Arthur Brisbane, in the lobby of the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, and ask him about continuing my motion-picture column on the *Herald*.

Brisbane, the leading editorial writer of his day, and I later became friends. But that afternoon, tired and discouraged as I was, he seemed one of the most brusque men I had ever met. "There's not enough general interest in motion pictures," he told me curtly. And that was that. Hearst was also a visitor in Chicago at that time. But after the rebuff from the second-in-command, I couldn't see how I could gain anything by getting another from headquarters.

Perhaps it is just as well I was not "inherited" along with the *Herald*. But it takes time to discover where we have been lucky in the face of disaster—and I was beside myself with worry. I had saved no money. There was no column job on a Chicago paper that was not filled by a man or a woman I knew and liked. Many unflattering charges have been made against me in my time, but going after the other fellow's job is not one of them.

I couldn't shake the depression over the sale of the *Herald*. To this day I cannot hear of a newspaper being sold with-

out reliving those terrible pangs and wondering if someone else isn't suffering as I did long ago.

One bright spot in the whole mess was the encouragement that James Quirk, editor of *Photoplay* (the leading motion-picture fan magazine), gave me. Jimmie was a lovable Irishman with a devastating wit. He had been my friend for many months, so when he telephoned and asked me to come and see him I hastened to keep the appointment.

I must have been the picture of woe, for he took one look at me and said, "Look here, I used to think you were the gayest, brightest girl in this town and the most promising young writer. Maybe I was wrong. If you don't believe in yourself how can you expect me or any other editor to believe in you?"

"The place for you is New York, but first pull yourself together. Write me a story on the part the movies are playing in the war effort, and I'll feature it."

Jimmie paid me \$25 for an article which he called "Propaganda." It appeared in the *Photoplay* issue of September 1918 and was, as he promised, featured on the cover.

It was a wonderful lift to my morale.

In December 1942, right after the Pearl Harbor tragedy, I was in New York. The new editor of *Photoplay* (Jimmie had died ten years ago) telephoned to ask me if I would write an article on the part motion pictures were playing in the war. I couldn't help but think, when I agreed to do it, that God had indeed been good to me. The fat check I received didn't look half as big to me as that \$25 many years ago.

William Curley, now the head of the *Journal-American* and one of my best friends, also advised me to go to New York. I was through in Chicago—the gay, brazen town I had loved so well—and I knew it. Wearily, desperately, I packed my things and Harriet's, and spent what remaining cash I had for a one-way ticket to New York. I couldn't see through the tears

that blinded my eyes as the train pulled away from the familiar landmarks—so I didn't clearly say good-bye to Chicago. I never have.

3

I have sometimes wondered what course my life would have taken if I had then gone to Hollywood instead of to New York. I had made valuable and warm friends among the movie people whom I had met in Chicago. Although I had never set foot under Hollywood's famous pepper trees, I knew the folklore of the town by heart. Millions of words had poured out of my typewriter about this little town I had never seen.

The fabulous mushroom growth of Hollywood into a Magic City of Make-Believe has no parallel anywhere in fiction, fable, or reality. By Hollywood, I mean Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Culver City, and everything that movies touch and which we curiously enough call "Hollywood."

Now Hollywood is the trademark of a giant industry. Once it was a state of mind. Its growth has really been divided into four phases—the land era, the oil era, the movies—and now, aircraft. Originally, the outskirts of Los Angeles (Hollywood) were the domain of the great land barons who, accidentally, found themselves sprayed with the magic of Oil.

The Dohenys, the Canfields, the Baldwins, and the Bannings were the Lords who held in their palms the political and social reins of this Western community—and lowly indeed were the "refugees" who had begun to clutter up the place as denizens of the first movie studios.

The studios were little more than glorified barns. The Christie Brothers founded their first comedy factory in an old warehouse on the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower. Right around the corner Cecil De Mille, Jesse Lasky, and Sam Goldwyn turned a stable and a hayloft into the imposing-

sounding west coast studio of Famous Players-Lasky. When the famous diva, Geraldine Farrar, came to this studio to make *Joan, the Woman*, her hastily constructed private dressing room had bits of straw peeking between the boards!

Out in the valley and over the Cahuenga Hills, Uncle Carl Laemmle had established Universal City on a hundred sprawling acres—and Uncle Carl was raising cows and chickens on the back lot.

Movie actors were outcasts admitted to none of the good clubs, seldom invited into the swank homes—and apartment houses featured signs reading: NO DOGS, CHILDREN, OR ACTORS!

Perhaps it was a defense mechanism that made the early movie colony a little clan unto itself. Far from being downhearted, movie players were like children, and, like children, they got in and out of trouble, they married and divorced, lived and loved, like gay gypsies with laws of their own making.

Those first movie stars of the silent screen worked hard and played recklessly. Money was spent like water on "toys." The automobiles that toured the tree-shaded streets were bright red, green, or yellow. Swimming pools were pale pink and baby blue.

Serious artists were thrown under the same roof with boys and girls just out of their teens, who, except for the magic quality of photographing well, might have remained garage mechanics or pretty little waitresses.

Seventeen thousand dollars per week was paid by the old Fox company to Tom Mix—and when Tom built his mansion atop a Beverly Hills knoll he added the startling touch of his initials in electric lights on the roof of the house.

A fat boy named Roscoe Arbuckle made the world laugh—until too much fame and too much fortune wrecked his life and he was indicted on a manslaughter charge for the acci-

dental death in San Francisco of a girl named Virginia Rappe.

Wallace Reid, one of the most attractive and lovable men who ever lived, drove the Hollywood streets as if he were on the last lap of the chariot race in *Ben Hur*—only Wally's chariot was a low-slung robin's-egg-blue car with a horn that played "Yankee Doodle Dandy." The speed grew faster and faster for Wally until, overworked, tired, emotionally off balance from the adoration of too many women, he died tragically at thirty—the victim of the dope habit.

Mabel Normand, Mary Miles Minter, Buster Keaton, the Gish girls, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Tom Ince, Cecil De Mille, D. W. Griffith—one way or another were writing life stories in Hollywood that were as fabulous as anything they ever created on the screen.

Going to the weekly fights at Vernon was as important as an actor's next role. Charlie Chaplin, who had not yet donned the cloak of intellectualism, was not above doing a specialty act at the old Sunset Inn. Then Buster Keaton would try to top "the little king," followed by Fatty Arbuckle and Al St. John trying to top both of them.

Out at John's place, some of the band leaders and musicians who later became big names themselves were part of Art Hickman's orchestra. Buddy de Sylva, later a Broadway musical comedy producer and now the head of the Paramount Studio, played the ukulele. Abe Lyman was at the drums. Paul Whiteman was a violinist. Mickey Neilan, one of the best directors the movies ever produced and his own worst enemy, was a familiar figure at the piano—not as a professional but because it was a wonderful way to make love to beautiful Blanche Sweet. Wally Reid played the saxophone for fun.

In Hollywood, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, not yet married but already King and Queen of the screen, socially speaking, were my close friends.

When I needed a job so badly—why, then, didn't I go to Hollywood? It just wasn't in the cards, I suppose. Besides, the fare to New York was cheaper.

4

Perhaps I had an instinctive feeling that New York was going to be lucky for me. And it isn't in my nature to cry for very long. It is one of the blessings of my life that things that are past—are past. Yesterday's calamities are merely today's challenge. I can get down—but I can't stay there.

When I arrived in New York to find a job, I parked myself in the apartment of my brother, Ed, who had married while I was in Chicago and had moved, with his family, to the big town. Ed was glad to see me, but not too sure I had made the right move. "It's a tough town," he said, "a tough town."

I didn't invent the phrase—but I was sure I could "take it."

Two prospects had shaped up on the horizon. One, an appointment with W. E. Lewis, publisher and editor of the *Morning Telegraph*, the other with a Mr. Paul Brunet, head of Pathé. They were both a slight hangover of "pull" from my newspaper job in Chicago. When I had been a working newspaperwoman, the charming Mr. Brunet had told me over a dinner table that he would be delighted to have me come to work in the Pathé publicity department. But offering an accredited newspaperwoman a job and feeling the same way about someone out of work are two different schools of thought. I believed W. E. Lewis was my best bet—and he was.

But Lewis was a big man and not easy to see. Credit for the interview, so often given to other people, really belongs to John C. Flinn, who was then in charge of publicity for the old Famous Players Company, now called Paramount. John had given Lewis a big sales talk about the value of Louella

Parsons (who was worth at current quotations about \$20 in the world), and Lewis had at least listened to him.

After John had contacted the editor, written recommendations from Winfield Sheehan, Lewis J. Selznick, Adolph Zukor, and Carl Laemmle (all of whom I had met and interviewed while on the *Chicago Record-Herald*) were received by Lewis, who later told me he thought I had done a very good job exploiting myself.

As a matter of fact I hadn't asked for a single one of these letters. These men, hearing that I wanted to come to New York, had written on their own initiative. And since they were all big advertisers Mr. Lewis naturally was receptive to their suggestions.

As I caught the bus at 116th Street to keep the appointment with Lewis, I found a bright, shining nickel on the step. More than any other greeting New York had given me, it seemed to say: "You have come to the right place, Louella—and you're heading in the right direction."

But the interview didn't start off too brightly. Lewis said: "I can't tell you about a permanent job, because something is happening which will not be settled until Thursday. Come and see me then," he said. "If you go to work for the *Telegraph* your salary will be \$75 a week. If you don't, we will pay your fare back to Chicago."

What I didn't know was that W. E. was waiting for his partner, Edward Thomas, to settle certain contracts and stock purchases. The next three days dragged by like slow death, and I heard nothing from the *Telegraph*.

Finally, I decided to be smart. I would play hard to get. I telephoned Mr. Lewis and asked if he had made up his mind, because I couldn't wait any longer. I was—going out of town!

"Where are you going?" asked W. E.

"Brooklyn!" I said indignantly, and never before or since

have I heard a man laugh like that. "Well," he managed finally to gasp, "before you leave on your tour—the job is yours. You can start Monday."

5

My first important assignment on the *Morning Telegraph* was covering the Motion Picture Theatre Owners Convention in Boston. W. E. called me in, handed me a ticket and \$200 for my expenses.

Two hundred dollars! Just like that! Was there more money in the world? "I'll bring most of it back to you," I said, trying not to act impressed.

"Why?" said Lewis. "As representative of our newspaper I want you to stay at the best hotel." I nodded dumbly. With \$200 I figured I could stay in Paradise. "And, er—Miss Parsons," he coughed as I started to back out the door, "maybe you might need some new clothes!"

Amazing what even a short time out of a job will do for a woman. I hadn't thought I looked exactly seedy—but the little things, the accessories, the brand-new manicure, the perky spring hat that means so much to feminine morale—well, I had just figured I hadn't the money to spend. Harriet needed things more.

But I took W. E.'s hint—God bless him. I bought myself a lavender summer dress with a big hat, a dark blue dress to travel in, a blue felt hat, and a white evening dress—and all in all, I felt pretty pleased with myself when I stepped on the train.

The convention was no cinch to cover. The *Telegraph* considered it of sufficient importance to get out a special edition to keep apace of *Variety*, a rival trade publication that was really going to town on the event just as we were because of the big advertising accounts.

But what would have amazed the publishers of *Variety* and

might have added a few gray hairs to W. E.'s fine scalp is that on the train to Boston I met Freddie Schrader, the *Variety* reporter—and from there on the competition was practically an amalgamation!

Freddie and I got on. We spoke the same language. He was on to the ropes—and I wasn't. And so it was Freddie who gave me my first lessons on how to cover a convention—how many words to file and just who should be interviewed to keep those advertising accounts singing. Yes, verily, Freddie knew the answers.

Before the Boston convention was over I had met all the theater owners and was on first-name acquaintance with the most important ones. Since then, I have covered many conventions—movie and political—but I have never had more fun than I did in Boston.

In the daytime I was very much the official reporter, sitting down close to the speakers' platform and making notes with far more of a flourish than the long, dry speeches warranted. But in the evening I went *femme fatale*.

Why don't we career women be honest? It is all right to say we do a good job and can hold our own with men in most of the jobs we handle. But, luckily, men haven't discovered this. To this day the creatures still feel that a woman out in the world deserves special attention, flattery, and help—and I, for one, am perfectly willing that they keep on thinking so.

There is nothing immoral about a whiff of perfume or the fact that a girl can dance well, given a partner who doesn't rip off her shoe buckles. Sometimes an attractive hat can get you in where angels fear to tread. Why not admit it—and make it pay dividends?

When I returned to New York, W. E. said he had something to talk over with me—and instead of the office, he suggested *we lunch at Claridge's!*

Promptly, I suspected the *worst*. But I reckoned without one of the finest, kindest men I have ever known. W. E., as we affectionately called him, had a sense of humor and an eye out for a pretty girl. I wasn't so bad to look at in those pre-"plump, pompous" days—if I do say so as shouldn't. But what I might have thought W. E. might have had in mind—he *didn't*!

What he wanted to tell me was that Dick Watts, who had been editor of the motion-picture section of the *Telegraph*, was being called to the service. It was the second year of the first World War, and under Watts our movie advertising section had been coining money. W. E. didn't want it to drop off. He offered me the job.

Now what I didn't know about making up a newspaper (one of the big duties of an editor) would have filled a five-foot book shelf. I wanted the job—but I was afraid to tackle anything where my ignorance might cost my paper big money.

The Sunday editor, Theodora Bean, made up my mind for me. "Take it," she said when I went into a huddle with her. "Don't be a fool. Take any promotion you can get in this business."

"But I don't know one kind of type from another," I said, my conscience hurting me. "And I've never written a head for a story or a caption for a picture in my life!"

"Look here, Louella," Teddy said, "you take the job and I'll teach you how to make up a paper." And she did.

Far into that night, Teddy and I labored in the composing room with the entire staff of compositors, who all pitched in to help the greenhorn learn her job. Jack Starkey, jovial Irishman and composing room boss, said he was proud of me. "But I could send you to jail!" he said just as I was about to fall in my tracks. "You're working without a union card!"

So the job of motion-picture editor was mine, and W. E.

promptly presented me with an all-feminine staff which he called "The Persian Garden of Cats." To this day I think he created this insane sorority purely for his own amusement and for the fun he could have stirring us up.

On my staff was Helen Pollock, the red-haired and really beautiful daughter of Channing Pollock (and Helen had a disposition as torrid as her hair). My other redhead was good-natured, easy-going Aileen St. John-Brenon, wife of Thomas Craven, the noted art critic, and niece of Herbert Brenon, one-time noted film director. Aileen was a lovable girl who was always late in the morning although she only lived three blocks away. She made the glib excuse each day that the subway had broken down. The others were Agnes Smith, the most brilliant writer of all my "cats" and the sister of Sally Benson, author of *Meet Me in St. Louis*; Frances Agnew, now a scenario writer in Hollywood, a girl whose nickname, "Fanny Mae," used to irritate her and delight W. E.; Gertrude Chase, in love with a famous artist whom she later married; and Dorothy Day, former Belasco actress, now married, living in Chicago, and still writing.

We might have made out beautifully from the start. As I have said before, I like women and I get along well with my own sex—but SOMETHING was terribly wrong. We were not only called "The Persian Garden of Cats" but we were behaving like a lot of tabbies.

W. E. would take me out to lunch and say, "Assert yourself. Don't let those girls get the upper hand. You are the boss. Make them toe the chalk mark."

Then, unknown to me, he would take the girls out, singly or in a group, and say: "Tell Louella off. Don't let her boss you. Start something!"

No man ever got such a kick out of publishing a newspaper—and no one ever deserved to. When we finally found out

what the grand old rascal was doing we became the best of pals, my garden of cats and I. For a long time we didn't have the heart to tell W. E. that we were on to his tricks. He got such a kick out of raising hell with us!

W. E. wasn't only a tease, he was also one of the most thoughtful men I have ever known in my life, and one of the most generous. He made possible my first visit to Europe in 1920, just as the world was trying to recover from the blow of the first war. My trip came unexpectedly and out of the blue, and to this day I don't think I have ever had anything make me so happy. It all came about through Olga Petrova, a friend I had made in Chicago.

Olga, red-haired, imperious, and a temperamental Polish star, was the Greer Garson of her day. Her throaty accent and the aloof mystery with which she surrounded herself had been widely publicized. She cultivated few people, and why she elected me as one of her confidantes and close friends I shall never know.

We were lunching one day in New York when she casually mentioned that she and her doctor-specialist husband, Dr. John Stewart, were going to Europe in a few weeks.

"Why don't you come along?" she said.

The idea of going to Europe at that time was as remote as a skyrocket trip to faraway Mars. I had Harriet. I had obligations—and, more important, I had no money.

"All very unimportant," said Madame imperially when I listed the liabilities. "I'll have your ticket, and you just bring along a little spending money."

When I timidly broached the subject to W. E. he not only consented to the vacation but loaned me six weeks' salary in advance. In August we sailed on a funny little Dutch ship for Europe.

From the moment the boat docked at Plymouth I was every-

thing you have ever heard or read about the typical American abroad. Places I had known only out of novels and from newspaper datelines—Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, Westminster, and all the other historic spots of London—were like a wonderful dream come true.

What particularly amazed me was the friendliness and accessibility of the unapproachable British. I was not known in Europe, for this was before the days of my syndicated column.

Yet, I had been there only a few days when I met the noted Lord Northcliffe, who promptly engaged me to write an American movie column for his film magazine *The Picture Goer*.

Several years later Northcliffe came to New York. It was during the time he was having a sensational feud with Lloyd George. I interviewed him for the *Telegraph*, and he asked me to take him to see how American motion pictures were made. We went to the Fox company after much difficulty in arranging the appointment—believe it or not.

Instead of the British nobleman and famous publisher being greeted with cordiality and respect, as he would be today by Louis B. Mayer, Darryl Zanuck, Jack Warner, Charles Koerner, Y. Frank Freeman, or any of our other Hollywood studio heads, pompous ex-buttonhole maker William Fox couldn't be annoyed. We were taken on a casually conducted tour by a red-haired, gum-chewing office boy who suggested that we might like to look at the latest news reel.

To my horror we were shown a picture of Northcliffe's bitter enemy—Lloyd George.

"I suppose, your Lordship," said the office boy, popping his gum, "you have met Lloyd George?"

Northcliffe looked at me and slyly smiled. "Yes," he replied, "I know the gentleman—and I think the gentleman knows me."

But, to return to my trip abroad, Petrova was in no hurry

to leave London. She was actually English bred and had appeared at the Palladium in London as Muriel Herbert. I was champing at the bit, eager to practice my high school French and to be able to say, when I returned to America, "Of course, when I was in Paris . . ."

Madame stalled so long I finally suggested to her that I go on to Paris alone. So, with a book of six easy lessons in French under my arm, my one evening dress, and far more nerve than I would have today, I arrived at a small French hotel called the "Westminster" in the Rue de la Paix.

Fanny Ward was the first person who called me—and when you knew Fanny, you knew everybody of importance in any capital in the world. Everyone came to Fanny's. Fanny went everywhere. At night I was always her guest at the cafés or at the smart parties given by her friends. During the day I was usually aboard a sight-seeing bus visiting Versailles, Fontainebleau, or some other historic spot with other tourists as thrilled as myself.

I might say the activities of Fanny's set by night and the actions of the sight-seeing crowd by day were a liberal education.

The highlight (and incidentally the low spot) of my initial visit to Paris was the cocktail-tea party Fanny graciously gave in my honor. Unfortunately, Fanny lived in a building with a self-operating elevator—and when the rattling contraption got stuck between two floors for a solid hour, the guest of honor was "unavoidably detained." I yelled at the top of my lungs for help. It finally came in the form of an old French concierge, muttering to himself about the noise I was making. When I finally dashed in, disheveled and unstrung, and told my hostess about my predicament, Fanny met it with her usual *savoir-faire*.

"Oh, darling," she said, "it's too bad you aren't more famous.

It would make such an amusing story if it had happened to Cécile Sorell!"

But even if I were not as celebrated as Cécile—I had my moments in Paris.

Harry Pilcer gave a dinner in my honor at his beautiful house overlooking all Paris. Gaby Delys had just died, and he had installed a shrine in her memory in his dining room.

Mae Murray was then married to the now famous director, Bob Leonard. They were much in evidence, with Mae staging matrimonial battles with poor Bob in every conspicuous night spot in Paris.

We often saw beautiful Olive Thomas with Jack Pickford, so the shock was especially keen when word came, on my last day in Paris, that poor lovely Olive was dead from an overdose of sleeping tablets.

But even the gayest of vacations must come to an end—and at the end of six weeks I left Paris full of daydreams about one day coming back as the richest and most famous newspaperwoman in the world, renting a penthouse on the tallest building in Paris, marrying a nobleman with whom I would quarrel excitingly and conspicuously in public—and never, never getting stuck in a public elevator again! I could dream, couldn't I?

6

But my life in New York was not all bounded by the four walls of the old car barn that housed the *Telegraph*. I hadn't been on the job more than a few months when I was almost drawn into a murder case. Someday I am going to write a book: *How to Be a Good Girl and Keep out of Trouble in New York*. On second thought, maybe someone who knows how should bring out that volume.

When I told my mother I was going to New York from Chicago she said: "I know only one person in New York well, and that is Charlie Chapin, editor of the *New York World*. He used to be engaged to your Aunt Hattie. He's a wonderful man, and he can introduce you to the right people."

Poor Mamma—she thought New York was a place where one immediately established connections with the "right people" (meaning morally and socially impeccable)—then, too, she had never heard some of the classic stories about old Charlie Chapin, who had the reputation of being the meanest man who ever edited a newspaper.

It was Chapin who inspired one of Irvin S. Cobb's most vitriolic cracks. Irvin, hearing Chapin was ill, said feelingly, "I trust it is nothing trivial."

So to make my mother happy I paid a call on Chapin, and, to give the devil his due, I must say he was nice. He asked about my mother and about his former "love," my Aunt Hattie, admitting she was the only girl with whom he had ever really been smitten. It was the sorriest day of my life when I said that he would be delighted to know, then, that Margaret, Hattie's eighteen-year-old daughter and my cousin, was even NOW in New York—and perhaps he would like to meet her.

A young cousin in New York can be a slight nuisance to any busy newspaperwoman. When Chapin said he wanted to send Margaret tickets to shows, to meet her, and to introduce her to some interesting people, I was frankly relieved. There is nothing like a nice, middle-aged man from your old home town to be a safe escort for a baby cousin, I always say. And do I rue the day I said it!

So delightfully were things coming along with Margaret safely under the chaperonage of a charming man like Chapin that I wrote my mother how often we saw him. Both she and

my Aunt Hattie wrote back: "You have never mentioned Charlie's wife. Hasn't he brought her to call?"

I told Chapin about my mother's letter, and he said: "I *want* you and Margaret to meet my wife. Shall we make a date for next Sunday?" It sounded fine. I knew it would make Mamma and Aunt Hattie feel better to hear about Charlie's wife.

But we never met her. Before Sunday rolled around Charlie's wife was dead. *Charlie had murdered the aged woman!*

If I live to be one hundred—which, please God, I won't—I shall never forget the day W. E. Lewis called me out of my cubbyhole of an office and said: "Louella, Charlie Chapin has killed his wife, and the police are looking for him. They are asking questions about you and Margaret—and they will be asking you questions. Move out of your apartment and go to a hotel until this blows over."

If there is anything more difficult to deal with in the face of an emergency than stark guilt—it is stark innocence. When I hurried home to get Margaret and to tell her we were going to "hide out" in a hotel room—and *why*—she balked like a Missouri mule.

"Why should we hide out?" she demanded with withering scorn and all the dignity of her eighteen years. "Because that old man from our home town sent us theater tickets and took us to lunch a half-dozen times?"

"But he is suspected of *murdering his wife!*" I fairly shrieked at her. "We can't be drawn into a thing like this." With little beads of perspiration dewing my forehead I thought of my mother and Margaret's mother—and the blistering I would get from both of them for not taking better care of a Young Girl in New York!

For hours, Margaret stood her ground: "We didn't do anything wrong," she said, and she said it so often I felt like committing a murder myself!

Finally, I demanded that she obey on the grounds that I was under *orders* from my boss. We called a taxi and went to the Astor Hotel—which was about as secluded as the Empire State Building. The first thing we did was to call up Agnes Smith, one of my staff writers from the Garden of Cats, and suddenly the whole thing began to assume the proportions of a whopping good adventure. We hadn't known Charlie's wife, and—while we were sorry for her abrupt demise—I have to admit that we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly.

For twenty-four hours we had our meals in our room and sent out for the newspapers. We read every word about the case avidly.

Chapin had been found—and confessed murdering his wife, a niece of Russell Sage. She was very old, much older than Charlie, who was no spring rooster himself. It later came out that the motive for the crime was this: Charlie had been systematically pawning her jewelry—for he was deeply in debt. There had been another woman in his life, a redheaded girl who had married another man and walked out on Chapin. (Margaret pretended to be highly incensed about this “discovery”—since, as she said, *she* was the one who had gone to all the trouble of “hiding out”!)

A highly hilarious angle of the case was Charlie's revenge on his redheaded girl friend. He had spent \$200 buying her mother a set of false teeth! When she up and married someone else, Charlie went over to the mother's house, walked into the bathroom where the teeth were reposing on the washstand, seized them, and flushed them down the latrine!

But these interesting denouements did not all come out at once.

In the meantime, Margaret, Agnes, and I continued to plot like fugitives on the lam in an Edward G. Robinson gangster movie.

It was decided by Agnes and myself that the best thing to do was to get Margaret out of town, and so, by contacting my friend, D. W. Griffith, I was lucky enough to get her a job on the road, press-agenting *Hearts of the World*. Margaret Ettinger has been a press agent, and a very successful one, ever since—a fact for which she has at times both blessed and blamed me.

But this time I wasn't taking any chances. I wired her mother to meet her and accompany her on the road—lest there be added Charlie Chapins lurking in various newspaper offices!

I remained in New York to face the music—and frankly it wasn't any fun. "Remember," W. E. Lewis advised me, "you are perfectly in the clear. You don't have to answer any questions, but you are going down to the District Attorney's office just to help them clear up certain angles on the case. Don't let them give you any third degree." W. E. had already talked to Governor Al Smith and told him the facts of our friendship with Chapin.

So, flanked by one of the best reporters on the *Morning Telegraph*, I went to the office of Martin McGee, a New York assistant district attorney.

The tall, good-looking hunter of criminals couldn't have received us more charmingly—but I had my righteous dander up. After we were seated, he sent for his secretary.

"If you want me to answer questions," I told him, "you'll have to send that stenographer out of the room. I won't say a word until she leaves." She left the room, bearing, I am sure, her own opinions about my guilt.

McGee wasn't long getting under way: "What about the sealskin coat your cousin wears?"

"Sealskin coat!" I raged. "You mean the one remade from her mother's old coat?"

"And what about your living in an expensive apartment?" McGee went on.

"I make \$100 a week," I stormed—"and Charlie Chapin only made \$125!"

"Well," sighed McGee, "did he have a key to your apartment?" That did it! All the frustrated "ham" came out in me. I staged a scene of outraged womanhood that could have been heard over the entire City Hall. The main gist of my theme was that I did not have to take insults from him.

"If you are going to insult me," I raged, "I will walk out of here this minute. I am a *good* girl," I fairly shrieked with my voice breaking; "my *cousin* is a good girl. And old Charlie Chapin is just an old friend of my family." With that I practically threw letters at him from my mother and Aunt Hattie.

I think by this time he was getting good and sick of "the good girl." "All right, Miss Parsons," he sighed, "but we will have to call you when the case comes up."

"Look here, Martin McGee," I said, staring him straight in the eye, "you can't do that to me. I've got a little girl at home—and you can't disgrace me—and her—by dragging me into any murder case."

Practically every celebrity in New York was called for that trial. But not one Louella O. Parsons, *Morning Telegraph* reporter. Martin McGee remembered the little girl who lived at my house. I'll always love him for that.

7

"Mattie," our adored Jennie Mattocks, had come on from Chicago to keep house for Harriet and me. Our apartment on 116th Street had three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. It took practically all my salary to pay Harriet's school (she was attending Horace Mann) and to pay the rent. In my time

I have been able to make money—but never to save it. It slips through my fingers like quicksilver. Sometimes when pangs of conscience overcome me in the middle of a sleepless night, I realize I should be a rich woman by now, thinking comfortably toward retiring on what I have made from my column, my years on the radio, magazine articles—and yes, even a movie.

But my bank balance never keeps even with my “figuring.” Like Saturday’s child, I will be working hard for my living (and to pay off accumulated bills) until Gabriel blows his final trumpet for me.

My salary of \$100 weekly on the *Telegraph* was good newspaper pay in those days. But it was never *quite* enough. Mattie made practically all Harriet’s clothes and occasionally whipped up something for me. But in spite of these “economies,” I could never make both ends meet. Whenever I got too deeply in debt I would take a piece of jewelry my mother or my husband had given me to my excellent friend, Mr. Simpson, the pawnbroker. Many people go through life just one jump ahead of the sheriff. In my case, he was usually apace and completely in stride with me!

But in addition to being habitually out of money, I have found I can never really worry about this weakness in my character.

Harriet was developing into a serious little girl. Her marks in school were excellent. She was a thrifty little thing—a quality she never got from me. She read a great deal and loved her studies—another trait I could never boast of. For such a small girl she had a great deal of dignity and social poise. She was popular with her wealthy schoolmates and was always being invited to their homes. She was making and forming friendships that have lasted through her life.

I was deeply proud of her, and nothing made me happier

than those quiet hours at the end of hectic days when my little girl would climb into my lap, put her arms around my neck, and say:

"I love our apartment better than all their big houses. I love Mattie, and I love you—and I would rather have you for a mother than anybody else in the world."

That made everything all right. Bright and shining and—all right!

8

And then I fell in love. Very deeply, very wholly, and very completely, I fell in love with a man who was not free to marry me.

Frankly, in writing this story of my trip through life I have hesitated about including this chapter. I could not be sure that it was the right thing to do. Not for myself—for I have never felt any tinge of regret over this love story that was such an intense motif in my life for so many years. *More son*

It is part of me. But where other people are involved, it is not always *my* story to tell. I believe that if I mention no names no one can be hurt—except, perhaps, me—hurt by criticism from people who can never understand how such a thing could happen. No one else can be hurt now. It is over and done with.

There are just memories left—and they are faded and eclipsed by the stronger and deeper love I have known with my husband, Dr. Harry W. Martin. It is his philosophy, "If you can't be honest with yourself *about* yourself—you can't be anything!" That gives me the courage to speak of this love in my life.

There is no real happiness for a woman falling in love with a man who cannot get his freedom from another woman. I know that. There are two heartaches for every joy you can

know. I have no enemy whom I hate so much I would want this kind of heart-torture visited upon her.

In the years that I loved this man I can say, truthfully, that as many of the heartaches and tears as he could spare me—he did. When I was confused and young and not sure of myself, I found strength in his strength and kindness, and inspiration in his fine mind and his advice.

I wasn't happy. I couldn't be under the circumstances. But neither could I help being deeply in love.

9

My first New York year rolled by. And then the second. I was glad for my job on the *Telegraph*. It was hectic and my days were crowded and too full for introspection. Old Bat Masterson, the Sports Editor, was my close friend on the *Telegraph*, and what a lot of fine talks we used to have. Sometimes just Bat and I—then again W. E. would join us, for Bat was a story teller par excellence of the good old days of the West.

Just a few months ago I wrote a lead story for my column that Harry Sherman was planning to film Bat's life. And if they get in one half of the thrills he lived through, it should be filled with drama—yes, and melodrama, too.

When I knew Bat he was just a kind-hearted old man, a boon companion of Theodore Roosevelt, who used to write him to come to Washington and tell him stories of the early West, and a grand newspaper crony. But what a past the old boy had left behind him!

In his younger days, as the first Sheriff of Dodge City, he had added many a notch to his gun as one man after the other fell under his sure gunfire. He first met and became friends with W. E. Lewis when W. E. was sent by the New York *Sun* to report on the James Boys' escapades. W. E. was then a very

young man, and when he caught up with Bat in Dodge City, Masterson drawled: "*Little boy*, take my advice and leave the James Boys alone. They'll eat you alive." But Lewis sent back great copy in spite of this good advice. It was through Bat that he was able to get those fascinating stories that started him on his career as a newspaperman. And he never forgot the Kansas sheriff. Later, when he owned a newspaper, he gave Bat the job of Sports Editor.

Bat died sitting at his desk writing the word "Opportunity." It was a word he knew by heart.

But it was Bat who did me out of the "opportunity" of making the most money I had ever had at one time—on a bet. I had a dream—a dream that Jack Dempsey won the fight from Jess Willard at Toledo. I went to Bat with \$50, all the money I had in the world, and asked him to place the bet for me—on Dempsey. "He hasn't got a prayer," said Masterson. "Keep that money in your purse!"

For days after Dempsey landed the surprise blow that made him heavyweight champion of the world, Bat Masterson, the big, bold Sheriff of Dodge City, couldn't look me in the eye without cringing!

James J. Walker was another of my New York cronies—though these were still the days before the one and only Jimmy became Mayor. At the time I met him Jimmy's ambitions were much more modest than a chair in the City Hall. As counsel for the Motion Picture Theatre Owners he was trying to beat Sidney Cohen in the race for presidency of this august body. Because Jimmy was Jimmy, and one of the most attractive human beings who ever lived, I was violently on his side.

Never will I forget our political jaunt to Washington, D.C., to try to get Walker elected. The cherry blossoms were in full bloom along the Potomac. Jimmy was in fine fettle, and I

wrote editorial after editorial extolling his charm to the sky. But both Jimmy and I reckoned without Sidney's steam roller tactics and his ability to swing an election. Cohen had that convention all sewed up, and Walker didn't have a chance. When Sidney was duly elected, W. E. Lewis wired me: "You have had your fun. How about getting on the bandwagon with a *winner* now?"

Even though he lost, that convention did Jimmy no harm. For one thing, he learned a few political tricks that were to stand him in good stead when he later ran for and became Mayor of New York. Men who wielded great influence met and liked Jimmy at that convention—and who could help liking him? There is a man of charm, wit, and warm humor, and his impromptu speeches are gems.

He once gave me an invaluable tip about speech-making, when, all armed with a laboriously prepared "speech," I found Jimmy tearing it to shreds before my eyes!

"Get up there and talk as *yourself*," said Jimmy. "It's the only kind of talk that matters!"

10

Movie stars were, of course, my daily diet. I made so many trips on the old ferry across to Fort Lee, where Dick Barthelmess, the Talmadge girls, Barbara LaMarr, Monty Love, and other headliners were making movie history and building their careers, that I could have steered one of the old tugs myself.

I lunched with stars coming on from Hollywood and dined with young producers who were just beginning to think in terms of million-dollar productions. The phrase "The movies are just in their infancy" was popular. But they were beginning to toddle nicely, thank you.

Now and then I used to drop in to the New York office of

Uncle Carl Laemmle to interview the little old man or to get some news about his thriving studio on the west coast.

Uncle Carl had an office boy, a slight, delicate, dark, almost spiritual boy, who always politely announced me when I arrived and ushered me when I left. His name was Irving Thalberg, and he was about nineteen years old.

One morning the publicity head of Universal called me and said he wanted me to meet the newly appointed General Manager of Universal City, who was leaving soon for the Coast. Our appointment was at the English Tea Room on Forty-eighth Street, where many of the theatrical and movie clan gathered for lunch. In those days, Howard Dietz, Ralph Block, Fannie Hurst, Thyra Samter Winslow, Agnes Smith, Viola Brothers Shore, and dozens of old friends used to meet there for the delicious home-cooked food.

So this day I walked in, waving "Hello" to the gang and looking out for what might be the new General Manager of Universal City. I finally spotted Uncle Carl's office boy standing quietly at the entrance.

"Where would you like to sit, Miss Parsons?" he asked, approaching me.

"Oh, hello, Irving," I said, as you would to a nice little boy. "Where is the new General Manager?"

"He's here," he said. "I mean—I am!"

"You are what?" I laughed.

"I am the new General Manager," he half stammered.

"Look here, young man," I said, "I'm a busy woman. I came here to meet the manager. Not the office boy."

"I can't help it, Miss Parsons," said Irving miserably, "I'm the new manager. Uncle Carl just appointed me!"

We laughed about that meeting many times in later days, Irving and I. To the day of his death this most brilliant of all producers was a friend of mine. I loved that boy very much.

There was such gentleness about him, such fineness. He made some of the greatest pictures that ever came out of Hollywood. Yet his name was never on the screen claiming even indirect credit for them.

He met, loved, and married Norma Shearer, and they had two beautiful children. Irving scaled the heights and knew success such as few men ever knew. In the course of his career he held the reins of two big companies in his hands—Universal first, and later, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

His word was law. But his word was always gently spoken. Before he was anything the little giant of the industry was first of all a gentleman.

11

The movie actress who was the most colorful to me as a personality in those days was Mabel Normand. There was no one quite like Mabel—and there hasn't been since. She was tiny, with huge eyes and a mass of dark curly hair that never seemed to be piled straight on her head—but slipped from side to side. It is one of the great personal tragedies of the industry that this girl lost her way.

Mabel was no puppet dumbbell—but she was not the “great mind” the fan writers made her out to be. She was an imp—continually playing a role both on and off the screen. Our first meeting took place at the old Knickerbocker Grill, and a party of people at the next table had indulged in a few too many cocktails.

“Some people do drink too much, don't they?” opined Mabel, rolling her enormous eyes innocently. “I never touch a drop—do you, Miss Parsons?”

Inwardly, I groaned. I was in no mood for an act. “I wish I had a good stiff drink right now,” I snapped.

"Waiter!" yelled Mabel, laughing her heart out. "Make it two *double* Martinis!"

The books that lined the walls of her apartment would have been a suitable literary diet for the President of Harvard, and while the magazine writers accepted this evidence that Mabel was a deep reader, I just couldn't swallow it. "How many of those books have you read?" I once asked her accusingly.

"Not a one," said Mabel, "but I've read the reviews!"

She loved one man devotedly as long as she lived. That man was Mack Sennett. But she was always hounded by the fear that she could not hold him. Rightly or wrongly, Mabel was jealous of the beautiful women who worked for Mack. Because *she* loved him so deeply she thought everyone else did.

As the years went by for Mabel and Mack, they eventually drifted apart—but she was never free of him in her heart. Even when another producer, Samuel Goldwyn, met her and fell head over heels in love with her, Mabel could never forget Mack.

Let it be said to the everlasting credit of Sam Goldwyn that he not only adored the impish, fun-loving girl, but he spent a fortune on her trying to cure her of the habit of taking the sleeping tablets that finally led her to taking dope. Sam fought hard to save her. Finally, even his courage and the strong, protective arm he offered to help her failed. Sam had to give up and watch the girl he wanted to protect drift down the road on sensational headlines to mental and physical disintegration—and, at length, to her death—alone!

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST GLIMPSE I had of Marion Davies was when she appeared as a very young girl in the *Follies* with Justine Johnstone, Ann Pennington, and other girls who were later to become famous. I thought she was one of the loveliest things I had ever seen. Her role was not large, but even across the footlights you could see that her eyes were deeply blue, her blonde hair was its natural color, and she was fresh and intensely *alive* looking. But I did not actually meet her until a year later.

In that time Marion had become a motion-picture star and was making pictures at the Cosmopolitan Studios. She had just completed her first starring movie, *Cecilia of the Pink Roses*—and she wasn't too happy about it. Movies were crude things at best in those days, and Marion didn't feel the picture lived up to the enormous amount of publicity it received.

Her press agent, Rose Shulsinger, who adored Marion and would have laid down her life just to make her happy, asked me if I would lunch with her—and tell her *Cecilia* wasn't as bad as she thought.

She had received so much publicity I expected to find a haughty star, affected and sure of herself, waiting for me. But instead I found a golden-haired girl, little more than a child, who was dressed in a simple blue suit that a schoolgirl might have worn, and who spoke with a delightful and confused little stammer.

It is impossible for anyone to meet Marion Davies and not like her. Even when she was very young she was never a gaga

ingénue type. She didn't inherit that strong, determined chin for nothing. And while she looked like an angel, she had great wit and charm and poise.

I liked her from the beginning. She had no false illusions about herself and kidded *Cecilia* with disarming frankness. And I was pleased that she seemed to like me, for she asked me to lunch with her soon again at the studio.

Marion's first hit picture was *When Knighthood Was in Flower*—a comedy, which is certainly her forte. As an actress portraying the delightful role of King Henry's younger sister, she had improved a thousandfold over all her other screen performances. There was a big opening for the picture in New York, and, as usual, movie critics gathered in the lobby of the Criterion during intermission, to hash over the performances.

"I think Davies is swell," I said—and most of them agreed with me. But it was popular in those days to "get out the hatchet" to earn our salaries—and so, when I couldn't honestly find anything to pick on Marion about, I wrote an editorial blasting William Randolph Hearst for bragging about spending so much money on the picture.

Addressing my remarks personally to Mr. Hearst, I wrote: "Why don't you give Marion Davies a chance? She is a good actress, a beauty and a comedy starring bet. Why talk about how much was spent on the lovely costumes and the production cost?"

The *Telegraph* was pleased and amused with my editorial. But what they didn't know—and neither did I until later—is that the competitive William Randolph Hearst got a chuckle out of it. That isn't what we had planned. Everyone was convinced that my particular "goose" was now well cooked with Hearst.

Marion and I continued to see one another spasmodically. But we didn't meet often, so I was slightly surprised when she

telephoned and asked me if she could go with me to a dinner given by the Theatre Owners of America (how those boys have cropped up in my life!), where I was booked to make a speech. She said she would pick me up at my apartment.

The night of the dinner I was late getting home from the *Telegraph*—as usual. It was Harriet who answered the phone while I was dressing and told me that Miss Davies was downstairs. I told Harriet to ask her to come up. "She can't," Harriet relayed, "she has a young man with her."

Break my neck as I did getting dressed, it was still a good thirty minutes later when I dashed breathlessly down to the lobby to find to my horror that "the young man" in waiting was none other than William Randolph Hearst!

Well, I was in for it now! Not only had I kept him waiting, but only the Sunday before my editorial panning him about "bragging" had appeared in the *Telegraph*. All right, let him be mad! I didn't feel any too kindly toward him anyway. Hadn't his friend and counselor, Arthur Brisbane, turned me down flat when I asked for a job in Chicago? So with my feathers ruffled a bit, the three of us got in the car and started for the banquet.

What conversation there was was cheerfully carried on by Marion, and when we were almost to the hotel I happened to catch Mr. Hearst's eye. He was smiling. "I read your editorial," he said. "It was good. You should write more things like that!"

You never know, as the saying goes, your luck!

2

Many things have been written about the way I got my job with the Hearst newspapers. Some of the rumors are enough to make your hair stand on end. The truth—far from being amazing—is merely amusing.

Marion was making *Janice Meredith*, and she invited me to a luncheon given for the press. I was peeved and a little out of sorts that morning. Frankly, I was feeling sorry for myself. Work was piling up on me at the *Telegraph*, and I felt I wasn't getting enough money for the responsibility placed on my shoulders. Sitting next to Marion at the luncheon, I aired my woes: "That *Telegraph*!" I said. "I'm getting good and tired of things down there. I think I'll leave."

"Well," said Marion, "Mr. Hearst will be interested in hearing that. May I tell him?"

I said, "Yes"—and then forgot all about it. The next day the *Telegraph* and I were all hearts-and-flowers again, and I had completely forgotten my temporary peeve.

But early the following morning a man named George d'Utassy, a Hearst executive, got in touch with me and said that Mr. Hearst would like me to have dinner with him. Ouch! I adored W. E. Lewis and I didn't want to leave. I thought my job on the *Telegraph* gave me far more leeway and independence than working for a Hearst paper ever would allow.

I thought of something "smart." I would put my salary so high that Hearst would lose all interest.

When we met that night at dinner, Mr. Hearst asked: "How would you like to work for me?" Without batting an eye, I said, "I couldn't think of making a change for less than \$250 a week"—which, to me, seemed like all the salary money there was in the world.

To my astonishment, he replied: "All right. I will have a contract made up for you to sign."

Touché! Not only was the applecart upset—but all the apples were rolling right into my lap—and they were golden.

I was getting only \$110 on the *Telegraph*—but I was afraid

of the Hearst organization. In the back of my mind I could hear Richard Henry Little advising me: "Never work for Hearst." So, grasping at a straw, I said: "I couldn't sign any contract without consulting a lawyer."

The next day I went to Nathan Burkan, famous New York lawyer, with my problem. "I'm sorry, Louella," he said, "but I can't represent you because I already represent Mr. Hearst."

Maybe this was an "out." "All right," I said coldly, "just tell Mr. Hearst to forget it. If I can't have you for a lawyer I am not going to sign any contract."

Nathan was amused. He said he would draw up a contract for me. And on land or sea, before or since, there has never been a contract like that one! It called for everything under the sun—all in my favor. When Mr. Hearst saw it, he said: "I can't sign that thing. Send her the regular form."

But little Louella was signing no "regular form."

That dream contract was not signed—but it looked so pretty that I carried it around in my purse for weeks.

Hearst had been away on a short trip, and it was November 19, 1922, when his secretary telephoned me from the Ritz Hotel. It was Joe Willecombe, Mr. Hearst's executive secretary, and now one of my best friends, a man who is never too busy to hear your troubles and to help right any newspaper misunderstanding. He said: "Mr. Hearst would like to see you again. And bring along that contract!"

•But this time the contract looked like it had gone through the wars—all of them. It had lipstick stains on it, and across the back I had jotted notes about reviews or interviews.

Mr. Hearst looked at it a minute—then picked up a pen and signed the dilapidated piece of paper. Suddenly, he glanced up, smiling:

"I'm disappointed in you," he said.

"Why?" I quaked.

"Miss Parsons," he said, "you forgot to ask for *hairpins*."

I was in no mood for comedy, and I was half through the door when I heard Mr. Hearst speaking to me again. He was holding the contract toward me. "In making your escape," he drawled, "you have forgotten the guilty evidence!"

3

I left the *Telegraph* not only with W. E. Lewis' blessing—but practically on his advice. Naturally, I had told him from the beginning about my negotiations with Mr. Hearst. It was W. E. who told me:

"You have worked hard—and frankly the *Telegraph* isn't in very good condition. Perhaps I shouldn't tell you this, for Mr. Thomas, who has the controlling stock, is willing to give you a percentage of the profits to keep you. But you have a daughter to support. In this world, Louella, we can't let sentiment keep us from bettering ourselves."

He was a grand old gentleman, W. E. I have been a wonderfully lucky woman in the matter of the men I have worked for—and the editors with whom I have been associated.

There were to be times in my life later when I was looked upon as a devil-on-wheels, but I know in my heart that it is not my own people, the newspaper clan, who have felt that way.

Shortly after I moved into the luxury of a "private office" shared only by Alan Dale, the drama critic on the *American*, the movie people in New York and my old associates from the *Telegraph* and my new ones on the *American* gave me a luncheon.

It was at the Astor Hotel, and they presented me with a beautiful fitted bag. I looked around the room and saw my "Garden of Cats" at one table and my new co-workers at

another. There was a blur over my eyes and a lump in my throat I couldn't swallow.

For the first time in my life—I couldn't say a word.

4

The Hearst papers did nobly by me in launching the column. The advertising campaign they put on extended even into the pages of the rival *Times*, the *Sun*, and other metropolitan dailies, all carrying half-page ads with my name and picture. I wouldn't have been human if I hadn't been pleased over all this fuss—so it was with frank astonishment that I came home right during the height of the fanfare to find Harriet dissolved in tears.

"I didn't think you would do it," she wailed.

"Do what? What have I done?" I asked her.

"I was never so ashamed in my life," she sobbed, "seeing my mother's picture plastered all over a *wagon* driving past school today! It's just *terrible!*"

Fame, like beauty, I learned, is in the eye of the beholder.

My work for Hearst on the *American* remained much the same as it had been for W. E. on the *Telegraph*.

I met movie stars everywhere—for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Some of them flared briefly, lifted to the heights on the unsteady footing of sex appeal. Some built wisely for long careers. Some were tempestuous, exciting, glamorous. Some were pitiful.

One of the most pitiful was Mary Miles Minter, who began as the Shirley Temple of her day. Occasionally nowadays I drive past a building on Beverly Boulevard that proclaims to the world: "Mary Miles Minter—Interior Decorating."

Every now and then today's newspapers picture a blonde woman, with lines of disappointment and disillusion marring

what otherwise might be the pleasing face of a plump woman, as some minor lawsuit crops up in her life. And invariably the papers hash back over the tragedies of her career—the William Desmond Taylor murder—the long-drawn-out battles with her mother, Mrs. Charlotte Shelby, over the fortune she had earned.

But somehow the tragedy of Mary Miles Minter started many years ago—and the memory of my first meeting with her is still fresh in my mind.

Mrs. Shelby had invited me to their hotel apartment to meet her golden child, who was just beginning to amass a movie fortune as a child actress. "And bring along your little girl," Mrs. Shelby had said. "The children will enjoy playing while we talk."

I had tried to keep movies away from Harriet as much as possible. But my nine-year-old daughter was so eager to meet Mary Miles Minter that I didn't have the heart to say "No." It would be like keeping a youngster from meeting Shirley Temple today.

That meeting was both a tragedy and a farce. I realized from the moment I set eyes on her that Mary was a young woman, dressed up and made to act like a child of ten. The golden curls that lay on her shoulders were well peroxidized, and her voice and her entire bearing were mature. Yet she simpered and talked about dolls—or she would have talked about dolls if Harriet would have had any part of it.

My child, usually well behaved, was sulky and kept tugging at my skirts to "go home." After a decent interval we departed, and I don't remember whether the door of the Minter apartment had closed behind us or not when Harriet exclaimed: "Mother! She isn't a *little girl* at all. I'm glad I didn't bring my doll!"

Poor little Mary was just one of a group of perennial

ingénues cagey producers were trying to build into a "second Mary Pickford." Mary stood head and shoulders above her rivals. But her closest competition came from a really charming young actress—Marguerite Clark.

Marguerite never met Mary on the Hollywood battleground. She was essentially a product of New York—and with Mary making pictures on the Coast, she quietly annexed the title of the Eastern studios' "Little Queen." She was a quiet girl, and always well chaperoned by her older sister, Cora. Cora watched her with an eagle eye, and although Marguerite had many admirers, she always gave the impression of being an innocent flower. She retired from the screen when she met H. P. Williams, a rich New Orleans publisher, and I must say it gave me a pang when I met her again in 1940 during her visit to Hollywood.

I was invited to a tea in her honor, which was the last time I ever saw her, for she passed on six months later. Marguerite, the beautiful little doll, had become a little old lady. I couldn't resist looking in a mirror to see if time had done the same thing to me. I feel I shall never agree with Burns on his "Oh wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursels as others see us!" Sometimes it is best, I think, to leave well enough alone!

5

The years rolled along—and they were good to me. I am not given to introspection, and never have been. I have always preferred action to analysis as an antidote for troubles. But I had come a long way mentally and spiritually from the frightened girl and the homesick bride of my girlhood days.

I have been accused of being a fighter. I am. I love a good battle, either personal or political. Combat has always cleared the air for me. All I ask is to be given an opponent who has

as much to lose or gain from the fray as I have—and then it is just a case of “may the best man win.” Like all proud people, I was independent, sure of myself, sure that I could be my own standard-bearer along whatever path fate led me.

And, like all proud people, I was to have my head bowed with sorrow and suffering—for God moves in wondrous ways to give us complete understanding of ourselves.

6

My salary on the *American* was double—and more—what I had earned on the *Telegraph*. But as usual with me, it wasn't enough! I had borrowed money to start Harriet on her first year at Wellesley. We had long since given up the apartment on 116th Street, and my rooms at the Algonquin, where I was living alone, were expensive.

Or if they weren't too expensive—my clothes, my social life, the little parties I liked to give, were—for something was keeping me from making both ends meet.

Whether I realized the strain or not—it was telling on me. I had not been feeling well for a long time. I had caught a cold and had not been able to shake it. It annoyed me. I had never been able to feel much patience with illness—probably because I had always been such an unusually healthy person. I continued to burn the candle at both ends.

It was a vicious circle. Up all night getting “color” for my column at night clubs and parties. At the office bright and early in the morning, sometimes after only two or three hours' sleep, when I would feel my resistance ebbing. And when night came—the same thing over again.

It was Election Day. My friend Jimmy Walker was running for mayor. I wanted to vote for him. I awoke feeling unusually tired. For the first time in my life, I wanted to shirk my job.

I wanted to stay right there in bed—quiet, drowsing. I was annoyed with myself. I had never been sick. I wouldn't be sick now.

It was an effort even to dress myself. My clothes seemed to weigh tons. I didn't see how I could keep a luncheon appointment I had made. The drizzling day felt cool against my face when I went outside. It felt clean and good because my whole body seemed so hot and feverish. And yet I could hardly keep my teeth from chattering.

I remember very little about the luncheon. The idea of food made me sick, and I knew I should go home and go to bed. But that was nonsense. No one went to bed on Election Day! And besides, I had been invited to attend a party that night.

I felt so sleepy. That was silly, too. I, who was never tired!

It was good to get in the taxi and just put my head back on the cushions while we rattled along toward the office. I was sitting at my desk when it happened for the first time. I had started to cough—and I couldn't stop. The force of the coughing shook my body, and then came the terrible hemorrhage.

My first thought was: "I won't tell anybody. No one will ever know. If I just keep on working and acting like nothing has happened it will go away. I won't be sick! Not really sick!"

My will said that. But little strings of fear were tightening around my heart. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to see a doctor. But I didn't know the name of one!

I called "Teddy" Bean, God love her. Keeping my voice as casual as possible, I told her I had had a little hemorrhage and said I thought I might drop by a doctor's office on the way home.

"You damn fool," said Teddy, "don't drop by his office. You stay there until I get there and find out about you." She gave me the name of a doctor.

I don't remember it. But I remember I had just the strength

to get to his door when I was seized with another violent hemorrhage. "You will have to go to a hospital," he said gently, after examining me. "You must rest and take care of yourself."

"Am I very sick, doctor?" I asked.

"I will tell you after I see your X-rays."

But it was Teddy Bean he first told that he had diagnosed my case as tuberculosis.

7

Teddy went with me to the Fifth Avenue Hospital. I managed to lie there the rest of the day trying above everything else not to think.

Why did this have to happen to me? What had I done that God in his anger should will me to die? I wouldn't—that was all. I had my little girl to educate. I had my work to do. I loved life. I wouldn't be defeated.

Again and again I assured myself that I wouldn't tell anyone what had happened. By ignoring Fate I could lick it. And they couldn't keep me there the next day. Harriet was coming home from school, and I was going to be there to greet her.

Even the short rest was good for me. I could begin to feel a little strength coming back into my body. Of course, I thought, I had been right all along. It was nothing. It would pass.

In spite of protests from the doctor and the nurse who had attended me, I was sure I was well enough to go to a little dinner party Mr. Hearst was giving.

For a few hours after I arrived I felt surprisingly well, talking with Arthur Brisbane, Will Hays, the Samuel Goldwyns (Sam had married the lovely Frances Howard, and they were honeymooners), and Constance Talmadge. The doctor had cautioned me not to drink anything. But doctors are notorious kill-joys.

When I began to feel a little weak I took a glass of champagne. Later, when Marion Davies called from the Coast to say hello, I ran upstairs to talk to her. That was really my undoing.

When I realized anything again, I was in a car with Sam and Frances. They were taking me home. I was desperately ill.

Now I knew I was done. I couldn't even pretend to fight any longer. All that night I walked the floor of that small apartment at the Algonquin. I couldn't cry. My eyes were dry and hot. Rebellion welled in my heart and poisoned it.

And everything about me, the muted sound of taxi horns outside, the ticking of the small clock on the desk, my own shuffling steps in bedroom slippers, the very beat of my heart, seemed to blend into the soundless rhythm of my thoughts, "My God . . . my God . . . my God . . . my God."

8

Mr. Hearst called me the next morning.

"Louella," he said, "you are discharged . . . on full salary, of course . . . until you are completely well."

I could cry then. At last the hot tears that had been burning inside me poured over. Such loyalty, such kindness, seemed more than I could bear. Where are there words to express further the greatness and understanding of this man who is so often vilified by people who do not know him? Certainly they are not at the command of "The Gay Illiterate." But if I could speak with the tongue of a Shelley, I couldn't add more to the stature of William Randolph Hearst than his own words had done.

I was "officially discharged" for a year, and all through my sickness Mr. Hearst sent me encouraging letters and telegrams.

Each week my salary check arrived as promptly as though I had been writing columns regularly on the *American*.

The day I left New York he sent train tickets for both Harriet and me to Colton, California.

9

Colton! Never so long as I live will I forget our arrival there on a typical California day of sunshine and glare. We went to a little hotel where I tried to lie down and relax. But the quietness beat against my nerves more than the clang of New York and Chicago had ever done. I stood at the window looking down on the sleepy, small-town street where not even the welcome sound of a taxi disturbed the midafternoon.

The excitement I loved, that was the very breath of life to me, seemed like a half-forgotten memory of another existence. The silence engulfed me. I could feel Harriet watching me, worrying.

"You'll like it here better, Mother," she said helpfully, "as you get your strength back. It will be a wonderful place for you to get well."

A wonderful place to get well. But, oh—I thought—what a hell of a place for me to die!

We had arrived in Colton in late November, and on New Year's I insisted that Harriet return to school. We had bought a little Chevrolet which she learned to drive, and together we explored the countryside. She kept up my spirits, kidding me, and never once mentioned her own disappointment at living in this hamlet away from everyone we knew—and missing these months of college.

It was a curious thing about my particular case of tuberculosis: I never had another hemorrhage after coming to California, and the doctors, in discussing the phenomenon, said

mine was a most unusual case. Both lungs in the upper regions were infected, but only slightly. It is a good thing that I had listened to the warning of my doctor in New York, or I might not have known I was tubercular until too late.

Harriet did not want to leave me—but I insisted, worrying as I was that she was neglecting her schooling. It had been the dream of my life that my daughter should have the college education I had missed. As my condition began to improve she finally agreed to return to Wellesley.

Colton, from the beginning, just hadn't been my dream town, and I decided that I would be happier in another little place, Palm Springs. Far from being the famous resort it is today, Palm Springs was just another desert town, nestled at the foot of towering purple mountains. But it boasted one of the best hotels in the country, The Desert Inn, managed by Nellie Coffman. Orange trees, flowering plants, and a riotous garden had been transplanted there by the energetic Nellie, who had made a veritable oasis out of sand and rocks.

Nellie was so kind to me—and so thoughtful. She was continually telling me of the people who had been cured there in the warm desert air. And for the first time in my life, I was taking care of myself. The cessation of the hemorrhages had encouraged me to believe that I was not going to die, after all. At least, for the first time in my energetic life, I was going to give myself the benefit of regular living—the “early to bed and early to rise” treatment.

The only excitement I permitted myself was talking long distance to Marion, Mr. Hearst, and other close friends. Those conversations were classics. There was only one telephone in the town, and it was in the hotel lobby. When I talked to Mr. Hearst I shouted at the top of my lungs to be heard above the din in the lobby, and everybody would stop to listen avidly. Usually I was so exhausted after these “long-distance” sprees

that I would have to lie down for hours to get my strength back.

There were discouraging moments when I felt I would never really be strong again. My lungs were mending—but I was disturbingly weak and enervated. The least little thing sapped what infinitesimal store of vitality I had piled up. But more and more, day by day, I would try to test myself—walking a little farther, until at last I could get to the end of the street and back. There was a victory!

No one ever came to Palm Springs—which is the best and the only reason I have ever been able to ascribe to the fact that one day, out of the blue, the illustrious John Galsworthy arrived at Nellie's hotel.

The old firehorse responding to the sound of the bell had nothing on me as I saw his name on the register. I wanted to interview him for any number of good reasons. One was that Galsworthy was chary of granting interviews, which would make what he had to say doubly valuable. Mr. Hearst had forbidden me to write anything. But if I could get a "scoop" . . . !

Perhaps the great Galsworthy was sorry for the thin, restless newspaperwoman who wandered around the little hotel like a transplanted ghost. He finally agreed to talk with me about motion pictures, *if I insisted*—and there was an interview I shall never forget! He blasted Hollywood to a fare-thee-well, and in no uncertain terms told me just exactly what he thought of pictures. The tall British novelist was far more intrigued with my "cure" than he was with my profession.

Right in the middle of a particularly uncomplimentary remark about the movies he would break in to ask me how much I weighed. When I told him 119 pounds, he would shake his head and murmur "tch-tch." And he was quite fascinated by my temperature, which remained alarmingly at 101. "Are you

sure that thing is accurate?" he queried, watching me take my temperature.

That interview with Galsworthy was run in all the Hearst newspapers, and it must have reminded my old friends, seeing my by-line again, that I was alive—if not exactly kicking.

The movie people started coming down from Hollywood to Palm Springs to see me, and before either of us knew it, Nellie had more business than she could handle. She had to enlarge the dining room and build additional bungalows, and she laughingly told me: "I hope you don't get *too* well—until I get the mortgage paid off!"

But get well I did in the twelve months that dragged by like twelve long, blistering years! Little by little I could feel my strength returning, just as surely as, during those dark days, I had felt it leaving my heart and my body.

I could even take part in the little festivities at the hotel. I remember Sid Chaplin sent down a print of *Charlie's Aunt* to cheer me up—and it was played before an audience that *was* an audience. There were guests of the hotel, a few members of the cast, and a group of dead-pan Indians from a near-by reservation who cracked nary a smile at one of the funniest old comedies of the silent days—still funny when Jack Benny remade it a few years ago as a talking picture.

Darryl Zanuck, later to become a powerful producer, was then writing scenarios. He and director Roy Del Ruth often came to Palm Springs to work. Darryl was so kind, always bringing me new books to read and telling me just what movies were being made in Hollywood and who was in them. Being in "on the know" was the best medicine I could take.

It was at a little party Winfield Sheehan and Raoul Walsh had for me (we had milk cocktails and ice cream to celebrate my recovery) that I said I was telephoning Mr. Hearst I was well enough to come back to New York and my job.

"Why don't you telephone now?" Winnie suggested. So, once again, I put in one of those unbelievable, shouting, long-distance calls to the "boss" in New York, with half of Palm Springs listening in!

The answer from the other end was not what I had expected. "No, Louella," he said, "you have obeyed me so far—and if you still want to please me, you'll stay in California for another year. You couldn't stand the New York winter. Of course if you insist on coming back, it's all right with me. But the movies are in Hollywood—and right now I think that is where you belong."

"But the column?" I protested.

"We'll syndicate your column," Mr. Hearst said.

When I turned from the telephone, I said to Winnie and Raoul: "Well, at last, boys—the *Hollywood writer is going to Hollywood!*"

CHAPTER V

IT WAS IN THE DAYS of Prohibition, the old Montmartre Café, the Cocoanut Grove, the Charleston and the Black Bottom, that I came to Hollywood the first time. Bands were playing "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby." The girls were wearing knee-length evening gowns and big bows on high-heeled slippers. Clara Bow was the biggest box-office star. Now we call those times "the good old days."

The social barriers had relaxed a little. It had become smart for the local socialites to include an actor in a dinner party now and then if only for the quaintness of the thing.

Tom Mix was entertaining Los Angeles bankers in more

ways than one around his fabulous dining-room table, elaborately equipped with a fountain that sprayed water alternately blue, pink, green, and red.

Lilyan Tashman eccentrically tied a large blue satin ribbon on the first white piano Hollywood had ever seen—and thereby earned a reputation for great chic.

Ona Brown, then the wife of director Clarence Brown, was a movie social leader. Bedecked in diamonds like a plate of armor up her arms and across a heart of more glittering gold than her jewels, Ona would preside over Clarence's dinner table, loudly remembering former and more affluent loves in her life.

Clara Bow, a lonely little thing, played poker in the kitchen with her cook, her maid, and her secretary.

John Gilbert landed in jail on a charge of disturbing the peace after Greta Garbo got as far as the courthouse—and then refused to marry him.

Bess Meredith's house on Crescent Drive (Bess, Frances Marion, and Jeanie MacPherson were the foremost scenarists of the day) was the mecca for the foreign writers, actors, and directors who were just beginning to filter into Hollywood.

Gloria Swanson had electrified the fan world by taking time off to have a baby at the height of her glamorous, coiffured career. A Negro hairdresser named Hattie, who whipped up Gloria's hair-dos, could have written her own figure at any studio in town.

Norma Talmadge and Joseph Schenck had bought the Cudahy mansion on Hollywood Boulevard—a sprawling, white, terraced estate that had already been labeled a jinx after Cudahy committed suicide there.

The beauties of Hollywood were the sloe-eyed Dolores Del Rio, the wide-eyed Madge Bellamy, the wistful Mae McAvoy, the golden-haired Marion Davies, the aloof Corinne Griffith,

the full-blown Billie Dove, and lovable, exotic Bebe Daniels, one of the closest woman friends I have ever had.

Not yet had Hollywood chopped down its shady pepper trees along the Boulevard—and not yet was the sight of an orange tree in the heart of “town” a rarity—when I arrived in the capital of the movies to make my home with my cousin, Margaret Ettinger, who had married Harry Maynard and was faring well as a press agent of the glittering darlings of the cinema.

Margaret had a small house out in the less hectic district of Hollywood and a small son, Gordon Maynard. It is a toss-up whether Gordon or I caused more havoc in her small, brown-shingled domicile.

I have always had a gift for creating a great deal of confusion in otherwise normal lives. I don't just live in a house. I live all over it—and notes for my column are just as likely to be located on the kitchen stove as is the coffee pot.

It was fortunate that Margaret and I were both busy women. Otherwise our joint domicile might have developed a case of too much personality under one roof. Instead, we had an enormous amount of fun in a wholly unorthodox household. We kept no particular hours, coming in from our jobs at outlandish times. We ate when we felt like it, talked half the nights away, gossiped endlessly about the merry-go-round of the town in which we were professional onlookers, and generally had the time of our lives. Harriet would come out and join us on her vacations from school, and if ever the phrase “a good time was had by all” applied to any group of relatives it applied to us.

Movie studios had become increasingly more important, more imposing. In Culver City sprawled the famous Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot, and the colonial mansion that first housed

Tom Ince, then Cecil B. De Mille and the studio where Hal Roach and his "Our Gang" kids made pictures.

The old Universal farm was now a city in more than name. Paramount occupied an acre in the heart of Hollywood. The Warners had erected an edifice that looked like one of the Houses of Morgan on Sunset Boulevard where Marie Prevost and Monte Blue made sophisticated comedies for Ernst Lubitsch.

But above everything rose the royal shoulders of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, regal and untouchable in their enshrined places as the Sweethearts of the World. Mary and Doug had merged their business interests as well as their real life love story and made pictures within a stone's throw of one another on the old United Artists lot.

Pickfair was the palace of Hollywood and Mary and Doug its Queen and King. At least once a week I dined with them—an honor that, in those days, was comparable to a weekly bid to Buckingham Palace.

There was the "Fairbanks" crowd, consisting of Charlie Chaplin, gay and amusing and not taking himself too seriously at that time, John Barrymore, Tom Geraghty—and last, but far from least, Elinor Glyn.

What a woman was Elinor! Redheaded, green-eyed, definitely regal in bearing and far more intelligent than her literary classic, *Three Weeks*, would indicate, Elinor was—without being fully aware of it—the life of the party.

She had a great trick of fixing her narrow, green eyes on one and saying elegantly, "Let's see—you remind me of some animal—is it a buffalo or a water spaniel?"

Elinor, herself, was definitely a tigress. She worked at it. She never permitted the picture of the queen of the jungle to leave your mind in her presence if she could help it. It was

la Glyn who decided that Mary Pickford was a fawn, Marion Davies a dove, and Clara Bow an "It" girl. Elinor said that Clara was the only woman she had ever met who had "It." The only male with "It" who had come under her ken was Rex, the King of Wild Horses! Ella Williams, known to all Marion Davies' friends as Bill, and I used to amuse ourselves guessing what animal Madame Glyn would call certain stars she had not yet named. Bill has been with Marion for many, many years and is one of her most loyal friends and one of my best friends.

At first I was afraid I was going to be terribly homesick for New York in this strange town of Hollywood. And then I began to love it. I have always loved color, excitement, action, motion. (If I am ever stranded on a desert island I hope it won't be one of those calm, peaceful places Dorothy Lamour and her sarong have made famous. I want my island to be under the threat of a volcano.)

I was having fun in my work and play—yet I kept prodding my strength and resistance much as a little boy will poke at an injured thumb. I felt well—but I wanted to make sure. The test came when Mr. Hearst gave me the assignment of covering the first Dempsey-Tunney fight in Philadelphia—covering it from the woman's angle.

I went to Philadelphia—and it poured buckets of rain. But it had no effect on my health! I sat in the downpour, drenched—but happy. I knew in my heart there would be no after-effects. I was well and strong and the master of my own ship again. Just to prove my strength to my own satisfaction I stayed in the East three months—through the bitterest weather. Finally I received a telegram from Mr. Hearst: "DO YOU WANT TO BE SICK AGAIN? IF YOU DO—STAY. BUT IF YOU VALUE YOUR HEALTH COME BACK TO CALIFORNIA."

2

The most glamorous and loved of all Hollywood hostesses was Marion Davies. Marion's annual masquerade parties were the social events of each season. The great of the musical, literary, and social worlds flocked around Marion—but her tastes have always been simple, and I think she enjoyed best the smaller, Sunday parties of friends around the swimming pool or around the dinner table at her Beverly Hills home, and later at her famous colonial beach house.

Rudy Valentino, Charlie Chaplin, John Barrymore, Mary and Doug, the lovely, ill-fated Alma Rubens, Harry D'Arrast, and Harry Crocker belonged to the coterie who met several times a week at Marion's house.

John Barrymore, the great lover of the classic profile and rapier-like wit, was an unending source of amusement to the entire circle. John wasn't as young as he once had been, and he kept his listeners in stitches recounting the agonies his cameramen went through trying to blot out the circles under his eyes and keeping his famous chin up under his mouth instead of resting comfortably on his cravat.

I remember one night we were dining with Alma Rubens. She was then married to Ricardo Cortez. Through slightly bloodshot eyes John had sat quietly contemplating Alma's camellia-like beauty, her white skin and dark eyes, for some time.

"Do you know," he finally drawled, "Alma is a cross between the Mona Lisa and a house detective."

Perhaps the quietest and most reserved member of our little group was the greatest screen idol the movies have ever known, Rudolph Valentino. A strange, introspective boy—for he was

little more than that—Rudy had the world of women at his feet.

And yet he was never happy in his personal love life. His explanation was simple—if cynical: "The women I love don't love me," he once told me. "The others don't matter."

I had met Rudy first in New York, before he had electrified the fan world with his vivid *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. His modesty was as much a part of him as his smoldering eyes and the patent-leather hair that made women's hearts pound so excitedly.

But we did not become close friends until the days in Hollywood when Rudy and Natacha Rambova lived together in a house overlooking Whitley Heights, high in the Hollywood Hills, with the lights of Hollywood twinkling at their feet.

Rudy was far more in love with the exotic, slant-eyed Natacha than she was with him. They were a strange combination of fire and ice, warm impulsiveness and aloof practicality. Natacha came of the wealthy Hudnut family, the famous perfumers. She was not impressed with Hollywood, the movies, fame—and, I have often suspected, not even with Rudy himself. If there was ever a case of opposites attracting—it was these two.

Natacha was a bit of a snob where movie people were concerned and preferred entertaining visiting artists and socialites to Rudy's studio pals.

I remember dropping in on them once when Rudy was sitting for his portrait for Beltram Masses, a pompous and arrogant gentleman and, to my mind, not the great painter he was acclaimed in Hollywood. Rudy, I am sure, was bored by the whole idea—but Natacha loved it and even pretended greatly to admire the horrid picture Beltram was doing.

The only other portrait I had seen that Masses painted in Hollywood was one he had made of Marion Davies. All I can

say, as an amateur art critic, is that it took a caricaturist to distort Marion's beauty—but this boy did it!

When Natacha and Masses took time out for a moment to eat a bite of lunch, leaving Rudy and me alone, I asked him: "Where are you going to hang this thing?"

A slow smile crossed his handsome face.

"I think the downstairs toilet is the most fitting spot," said the Great Lover.

It was almost a certainty that the marriage of Rudy and Natacha would eventually come to an end. They had nothing in common except Rudy's consuming love for her—but their eventual separation and divorce left Valentino with a wound from which he never really recovered.

Pola Negri? Ah, yes, the flaming Pola was a love in his life—a fact which she has never permitted the world to forget! And whatever happened in the course of that turbulent romance, from its many exciting comedy phases to the tragedy of Rudy's untimely death, it must be recorded that it was I who introduced Rudy and Pola to one another.

It was soon after Rudy parted from Natacha that we were all sitting around Marion's swimming pool one bright Sunday. Valentino was lonely, miserable, and hurt. I think he was looking for someone to be interested in—someone who could make him forget his shattered marriage. Ironical, isn't it, that the man so many women loved should have been lonely and lost on the highway of romance?

Rudy came out of the pool and, throwing himself down beside me, said: "Will you do me a favor, Louella? Introduce me to Pola Negri. I saw her last picture, and I think she is fascinating. Can't you arrange for her to come to one of Marion's parties?"

I knew it could be arranged—but I reckoned without the romantic coyness of the flashing-eyed Polish star who was the

talk of the movies as the naughty "Du Barry." Pola, with retinue, had elaborately established herself in a Beverly Hills home and then set out with almost impudent enthusiasm to try to dethrone Gloria Swanson as Queen Bee of the Paramount lot.

My brief little note inviting her to a party at Marion's and also hinting that someone "interesting" wanted to meet her was answered with an equally brief but polite little note stating that Madame Negri was out of town. Pola was playing hard to get—an ancient feminine maneuver that seldom fails to achieve results.

But a lady—even a glamorous one—cannot stall too long. In due time la Negri arrived at a masquerade party Marion gave. I took my sweet time about presenting Rudy to Pola, though I could feel the undercurrent of excitement in both of them from the moment she swept royally into the room. It was a violent affair of the heart from first sight!

And what a pair they were—high-spirited, young, beautiful to look at, and each practicing all his wiles to intrigue the other. I have often wondered what would have happened if Rudy had lived. Would it have been a real love story—or were they just two artists playing at an emotion at which both were past masters?

Valentino died on a trip to New York on August 23, 1926.

I think that, of all the death stories I have ever written, the toughest assignment I ever had was handed me by a managing editor who asked me to do Rudy's obituary while the young actor was still alive—seriously, critically ill—but still alive. Harriet and I were at the Virginia Hotel in Long Beach celebrating her birthday when the order came through.

"But Rudy isn't dead!" I protested.

"No," came back the order, "but he is dying, and New York wants the story in the office to send out as soon as the end

comes—which the doctor says will be in a few hours at best.”

With a mixed feeling of superstition and grief—superstition because I hated writing a death notice about a man still alive, and sincere grief because of my fondness for him—I batted out the story on my portable typewriter with tears streaming down my face. I kept saying, “This is all very silly. Rudy will live and we will laugh over his untimely death tribute.” But he didn’t live. Just two hours after I had filed my story the end came for the Italian boy who had achieved world-wide fame as a Lover.

I came back to Hollywood immediately, and Marion Davies, always sympathetic and understanding and deeply grieved over Rudy, suggested that we should visit Pola as soon as possible.

We found Pola at Falcon’s Lair, Rudy’s hilltop home, having one set of violent hysterics after another. Like some wild, caged jungle beast she would pace from room to room. She wept, she wailed, she clutched her long black hair, she fell on her knees crying to high heaven to let her die, too. Never in her most scenery-chewing moments as an actress did Pola stage such a performance as she put on before Marion and me.

CHAPTER VI

MANY OF THE HAPPIEST of those early days in Hollywood—in truth many of the happiest days of my life—were spent at San Simeon, the famed Hearst estate that lies about three hundred and fifty miles to the north of Hollywood as the Southern Pacific *Lark* flies.

There are few places in the world comparable to this fabulous garden spot atop a hill with the blue Pacific a shifting-hued carpet at its feet. Ancient and medieval treasures from all over the world have been collected by Mr. Hearst, who loves beautiful things as much as he loves life itself.

Years ago he bought Stanford White's marvelous collection. White, the renowned architect, was one of the first Americans to bring *objets d'art* home from Europe. Later, Mr. Hearst's own purchases were much greater than those he acquired from the late architect.

The huge dining hall of the main house, as one notable example, is ceilinged with carved life-sized figures of the saints, taken from a cathedral in Milan. Flags from the days of Europe's clansmen line the hallway, some so tattered they hold together by a few thin threads. Paintings by Rembrandt and Frans Hals, beautiful Gobelin tapestries, masterpieces from the masters of the world, treasures at once valuable and beautiful.

On one of my visits to San Simeon I was fortunate enough to meet an antique dealer who had sold Mr. Hearst many of his most prized possessions. During one of our walks he pointed out the pink marble columns in one part of the garden and told me they came from Verona—where Romeo wooed his Juliet, you remember. He showed me an ancient sarcophagus where a king had found his last resting place long before the birth of Christ.

Treasures from the land of the Pharaohs, balconies that once adorned a villa in Venice, magnificent silver candleholders and pews from old churches, the carved bed where Cardinal Richelieu slept when he was more powerful than kings—their histories were all told me by this amazing collector, whose eyes gleamed with enthusiasm as he talked. He told me that nowhere in all the world was there a finer connoisseur of art than Mr. Hearst.

The Chief originally called his beautiful palace "La Cuesta Encantada," meaning "Enchanted Hill"—but he has always referred to San Simeon as "the ranch." This is not as much of a misnomer as it seems. Grazing on the sloping 320,000 acres that make up "the ranch" are buffalo, zebras, deer—and at one time there was a giraffe and its baby. Herds of cattle, riding horses for the guests, chickens, wonderful dog kennels, acres of vegetables, fruit groves, and wide grazing valleys are an integral part of the color and scope of the property. For next to beauty Mr. Hearst loves animals. Heaven help any guest who, by chance, should run over one of the roaming deer, or llama, or kangaroos.

One night, I remember, a party of us, including Bebe Daniels, were being driven up the hill by one of the Hearst chauffeurs. It was very late and we were weary after a ride on the midnight special from Los Angeles. A very defiant and bossy moose parked himself in the middle of the road and refused to move. We honked the horn. We yelled at him. We made horrendous noises—but he merely gave us a wicked look. Bebe was all for jumping out and shooing him away.

But the chauffeur refused to budge! He said Mr. Hearst would not like it if we did anything to frighten one of the animals.

So we sat—and after an hour's wait, the moose moved nonchalantly out of our way.

So many animals are born in captivity there that they have no fear. Automobiles are a part of their "jungle" life, and they pay no attention to the noise of the motors. I have an idea you could saddle the zebra without ill effect—not that I am the girl who would ever want to try it.

At one time there were as many wild animals at San Simeon as there are in the Bronx Zoo. A wicked black leopard with tawny yellow eyes would scream like a mad thing at anyone

who happened close to his cage. There were also two chimpanzees who fought with as much noisy abandon as many of our best married couples. The elephants, however, accepted peanuts with the nonchalance of a Hollywood playboy. Everywhere there are rare birds, magnificently colored, preening their wings, chattering, singing.

There has never been such a thing as an unimpressed guest at San Simeon—and the great of the world have visited there. President Coolidge was a guest. So was Winston Churchill. General Douglas MacArthur has ridden over the many bridle paths that wind toward the sea or back into the hills.

But always the famed Hearst hospitality extended no more graciously to the great than to the most inconspicuous employee who might have been invited to the castle—or to one of the houses, over modestly termed "cottages," that cluster around the castle.

2

The gayest and the best occasions at San Simeon were always Mr. Hearst's birthdays. April 29th is a date on my calendar I will always love to remember. This is our Chief's birthday, and those of us who have the privilege of knowing him and who love him look forward to dining with him on his natal day—to give him the love and good wishes that are in our hearts for him every day.

Even if Mr. Hearst wanted to forget his eighty years—the world would not let him. Like rare wine, he grows finer, more mellow, and his talents more sharpened. As he grows older his editorials get better and better, and he has as firm a hand on his publications today as when he was first starting on the journalistic road.

Whether you agree with his policies or not, you must admit he has great prophetic vision. Long before the tragedy at Pearl

Harbor, Mr. Hearst had warned and warned America of the potential peril from Japan. He strongly advised against admitting so many of the vermin into our own California. He was criticized at the time as an alarmist—but now we know too truly and too bitterly how right he has been all along.

On Mr. Hearst's birthdays telegrams, greetings, and gifts arrive from the four corners of the world—tributes to a great American. His birthday dinners range from large costume parties to small intimate gatherings with just his family and a few of his closest newspaper associates. The last few years, since the war, the parties have been small.

In the earlier days they were usually large costume balls with much gaiety. At one time, when Arthur Brisbane was alive, seventy-nine house guests arrived at San Simeon for the festive event. Sometimes we were "Westerners" complete with sombreros, or again, we went back to the bepowdered wigs and luxury of Louis XVI's reign. Those were wonderful parties, and none of us will ever forget them.

One of the most pleasant birthdays of all was spent at Wyntoon, a second Hearst estate, nestling at the foot of Mount Shasta. Wyntoon was the favorite spot of Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, mother of the Chief. It is set in a grove of huge pine trees, towering over the rippling McCloud River, so clear that the trout play in transparent splendor for all the world like a fisherman's dream come true.

The whole effect of Wyntoon is that of a complete Tyrolean village straight out of the old world. The cottage housing the dining room is so far removed from the other buildings that it is necessary for guests to motor to meals. But the ride gives a zing to the appetite as the lucky visitor pauses to cry: "Look—a little bear," or "a deer," as various wild creatures are spotted along the roadway.

Since the war San Simeon is officially closed, and Mr.

Hearst divides his time between Los Angeles and Wynnton. His eightieth birthday, April 29, 1943, was celebrated in Los Angeles.

There were just a few of us, his sons and their wives, his editors, his official family, gathered around the table at the beach house in Santa Monica. Outside, the dimmed-out beach towns along the shore were barely discernible in outline. Inside, tall, tapering, silver candlesticks on the table lent a warmth and cheer that was reflected in every heart as we listened to Mr. Hearst return our greeting toasts. I will always remember what he said:

"I shall not pretend that I am happy to be eighty. I would gladly exchange that marker for two lifetimes at forty—just as a woman, reaching forty, would gladly exchange that milestone for two at the twenty mark. Yet, I am thankful and grateful that I find so much in life that is fresh, stimulating, and dear to me."

3

I have been Mr. Hearst's guest on many interesting and impressive occasions—but never was I more struck dumb with modesty than upon finding myself one of the few invited to San Simeon during George Bernard Shaw's visit. Immediately upon his arrival in this country Shaw had headed for San Simeon, and, while I have always treasured an invitation to the ranch, this particular occasion held a double-edged attraction. I wanted to interview the hard-to-get Shaw. I wanted to beard "the Beard" in one of his relaxed moods.

I told Mr. Hearst of my hopeful intention, and he wasn't too enthusiastic about it. "He is a guest here, Louella," he explained. "Unless Mr. Shaw expresses a willingness to be

interviewed by you I would rather you did not approach him about it."

But Marion Davies said, "Leave it to me!"

I happened to be eavesdropping when Marion approached the one and only Shaw in my behalf. "Please give my girl friend an interview," she said with the Davies charm turned on full force. "It means so much to her." The way Marion put it, I sounded like I had eight starving children to support and an ailing mother and father. "Really, you would be doing a wonderful thing," said Marion, looking as innocent as an angel.

Shaw had been on the verge of starting out for a walk. But even the famous "Caustic" could not refuse Marion. He said:

"Everyone wants to interview me!"

"Oh, I know that," replied Marion, "that is why it would mean so much to Louella." He turned and saw me then—and I can't say his expression was extraordinarily cordial. He was on a vacation he was enjoying very much with Mrs. Shaw, and it was obvious he did not want to be annoyed. But Marion is Marion. The upshot was he invited me to come to Cottage A, where he and Mrs. Shaw were domiciled.

Once inside, his humor did not appreciably mellow.

He began with: "You know everyone wants to interview me—and I don't know why I am bothered with you. You interfered with my walk," he added petulantly.

"You are very kind," I said, meekly.

"Kind!" he snorted. "Kind, indeed. What do you want to know?"

I stuttered and stammered and after a few false starts asked him something about Ellen Terry. "That," he said promptly, "is none of your business." I asked him what he had thought of Sarah Bernhardt—not as an artiste, but as a person.

"I never liked her," he snapped. "She reminded me of my Aunt Georgia, whom I always hated!"

Sparring and dodging, I somehow got through that interview which he had warned me could be printed only if he saw it first and gave his approval. I struggled over my masterpiece for hours, and when I finally returned it to Shaw he rewarded my efforts by blue-penciling it to the bone. I noticed, however, that he left all the compliments I had paid him intact!

"I must be the worst writer in the world," I fretted when he returned my mutilated brain child to me. Shaw said nothing—but the inference was that he never argued with a lady!

And then, for the first time, a really engaging smile spread over his face. "Here, you had better keep this manuscript with my corrections. It will be worth money to you someday."

When I told Mr. Hearst what Shaw had said, he replied: "Why don't you print your original story—with his corrections?" How was I to tell my boss that this beautiful interview was mostly all Mr. G. B. Shaw's fine handiwork—not mine? The story came out, and it was a honey—up to this minute only Marion and Bebe Daniels, who were vastly amused, knew that the best yarn of *my* career had been authored by George Bernard Shaw!

4

I have no closer friend than Bebe. Vivid little Bebe, with her warm Spanish blood and coloring, her loyalty, her sense of humor, and her great beauty, knows almost all the secrets of my life as well as I know hers.

Friendship between women is not nearly as rare as men believe. But I do feel it is unusual that Bebe and I have never

had the slightest hint of a misunderstanding or even a temporary peeve at one another. Even the closest of gal friends have moments of pique over something—if not a man at least a disputed chapeau.

Bebe is Texas born and California bred and loudly proud of both states. But I met her in New York when she came on from the Coast with her mother, Phyllis Daniels, to make two movies at the Paramount Eastern studio.

Bebe had more beaux than a dozen girls have the right to expect in a lifetime. Trailing along in her wake in New York were, to mention just a few, the brilliant Michael Arlen of *Green Hat* fame, Robert Kane, young Paramount executive, and Jack Dempsey—the old Manassa Mauler himself.

I think the secret of Bebe's fatal allure was that she was a paradox. With her Spanish ancestry she was and is as exotic-looking as a tropical flower. Yet she is a down-to-earth girl who can discuss the antics of the stock market with as much enthusiasm as she gossips about clothes, shows, and bridge! She can also be a tireless and irrepressible gagster—and on occasion as zany as the Marx Brothers, the Ritz Frères, and Olsen & Johnson rolled into one.

Bebe played bridge like a whiz. After I came to California and we took up our friendship where we had left off in New York, I had a little bridge party in which Bebe and Joseph Schenck were pitted against the talents of the old master, Ely Culbertson, and Chico Marx. La Daniels and Joe took the experts like Montgomery took Tunisia! Culbertson may or may not have been piqued. Chico most assuredly was! He played bridge like he thought he had invented the game.

Bebe's family seemed almost like my own. Her grandmother—"Little Mother," we call her—is a little old lady of about eighty, as dainty and beautiful as a Spanish version of Whistler's mother. Phyllis Daniels, Bebe's mother, is every-

thing a movie mother should be—and so seldom is. Bebe and I were so close we not only adopted one another—we adopted one another's families as well.

I sometimes think back on those days when Bebe and Ben Lyon were so madly in love and when I had first met the man I was to marry, Dr. Harry Watson Martin, as the happiest and most carefree of my life.

Harry and I were married six months before Bebe and Ben, but so close had our foursome become that, when the two kids were married, we moved into Bebe's beach house at Santa Monica with them and spent the summer.

The night Barbara Bebe Lyon was born my doctor paced the hospital corridor, step for step, with the frantic Ben, and I sat with Phyllis, vicariously going through, I swear, every pang and pain of the ordeal that almost cost Bebe's life.

It is proof of the great friendship we have always felt for one another that Bebe and I later laughed hilariously over another columnist's comment:

"In spite of the great friendship of Bebe Daniels Lyon and Louella O. Parsons, the story of the arrival of the Lyons' baby broke for the afternoon newspapers, doing Queen Louella, who toils for the morning sheets, out of her usual scoop!"

It was the first and the last time Bebe ever double-crossed me!

CHAPTER VII

IF THERE IS ANYTHING a woman likes to remember and to talk about it is how and when she met the love of her life!

We girls are prone to fictionize and embroider matters a bit, and as time goes on we usually succeed in convincing ourselves that we had a premonition that fateful day or night when "he" first entered the room.

In all truth I must say that I felt nothing of Fate tapping-me-on-the-shoulder when, one significant day in June 1928, I was ordered to cover the Democratic National Convention in Houston, Texas. I wanted first to take a quick trip to New York to see Harriet, who was in school in the East.

I met Dr. Harry Martin on the run—speaking quite literally. We were both dashing to board a train that had already started to move out of the Los Angeles Union Station.

As I sprinted along, completely surrounded by redcaps, some friends who had come down to see me off, and the usual station mob, I heard Margaret Ettinger shouting to me: "Louella, I want you to meet Dr. Harry Martin. He is going east on the same train with you." *If we catch it, I thought.*

I saw then, out of the corner of my eye, the shadowy figure of a man running along beside me—and suddenly I felt strong arms propelling me up to the Pullman steps. It was not until we were safe in the vestibule, laughing and panting for breath, that I had an opportunity to get a good look at my fifteen-yard-dash partner.

He had the most Irish face I have ever seen. "Whew," he laughed, in appreciation of our narrow escape. His color was high, and he had startlingly blue eyes that disappeared almost completely when he smiled. He had a husky quality about his voice that I have always found particularly attractive in a man. Nice, I thought.

But we did not fall in love at first sight.

For that entire jaunt across the country to Chicago we had too much fun just laughing together.

My Irish friend had an inexhaustible fund of funny stories—

and to this day I still laugh at them—but not the same ones! Being able to laugh at your husband's jokes may not be the whole recipe for a happy marriage—but it is an important ingredient.

My companion on the trip was Beulah Livingston, who was Norma and Constance Talmadge's press agent for many years. Beulah was immediately captivated by the doctor. He was loaded down with candy and books which he kept bringing to our drawing room like a little boy taking teacher an apple. He asked us to lunch and dine with him, not once but several times, and we were no more than the second day out when Beulah said:

"You know, I think the doctor likes you."

I couldn't believe it was any more than good-natured ribbing or perhaps subtle flattery, at which the attractive medic was very adept, I was sure! As for my own feelings—I was surprised at how much I enjoyed his company. For many years there had been just one man in my life, a man who I believed had won my heart forever, so that I had never seriously considered the possibility of someone else meaning anything to me.

But no group of travelers ever had more fun than we did crossing the endless fields of Kansas and Iowa. Lewis J. Selznick, father of David and Myron, was on the train, and Harry, Beulah, the Old Man, and I played poker from San Bernardino to Chicago. I won. Luck in all forms was certainly riding the rails with me!

In the midst of our fun it was disconcerting, to say the least, to receive a telegram from the man who had my heart in his keeping. It was a rude and abrupt message. He said that by delaying my visit a week I had made it impossible for him to meet me in Chicago as we had planned. Perhaps, he added, he *might* be able to meet my train in New York,

and he ended with the curt observation that if I had been able to leave my "fascinating" Hollywood a week earlier this tangle could have been avoided.

The injustice of the whole thing made me furious. I read and reread the telegram, getting madder all the time. Harry, who had seen me only at my gayest, was upset by the thundercloud that settled over my face.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

I don't know what made me do it—but I handed him the wire to read.

"What your friend needs," said the happy-go-lucky Irishman, "is a little of his own medicine—and a good lesson. Stay over in Chicago a day—and let him do the worrying about when you will arrive in New York."

I thought to myself, "You are very cute, you are, sir." Harry was on his way to attend a medical convention in Chicago and would be there a week! My Irish friend wasn't fooling me, either. But I was mad.

"That's a fine idea," I said, "but the trains are sold out for weeks in advance and I doubt if I could change my reservations on such short notice."

"I can do it," said the resourceful Dr. Martin.

I finally agreed to wait over in Chicago if he could change my reservations, making the pact because I honestly didn't think he could manipulate matters.

"I'm just about to send a telegram myself," said the doctor. "I'll let you read it."

It was addressed to Jack Dempsey, an old friend of his, and said: "I HAVE MET THE WOMAN I AM GOING TO MARRY. YOU KNOW HER. HER NAME IS LOUELLA PARSONS!"

2

A car met us at the Chicago station with a liveried chauffeur bearing my reservations to New York—for not one day later, but *two* days. With an expression all too innocent, Harry said: "It's a mistake. But as long as it has been made you might as well stay over two days."

Why not? I was still angry—and the doctor was most attractive.

But my general amusement was short-lived, for when I arrived at my hotel suite there was a long-distance call from my friend in New York. He was completely over his peeve and said that he would meet me at the train in the morning.

"I'm not coming," I said. "I'm staying in Chicago two days to see my—brother!" Bang went the receiver in my ear. Once again my heart felt like lead. I wished I hadn't been so brash—I was in love, and I couldn't bear the thought of trouble with this man. Perhaps he couldn't help being bossy. He was an important man, used to ordering big and little men around, and obviously he expected me to take orders along with everyone else.

I was weeping my eyes out a few hours later when orchids arrived and a note saying: "I will meet you in New York Friday morning. Forgive me?"

Women are strange creatures. Now that I knew everything was well in New York, I began enjoying myself to the utmost in Chicago!

Those two days were one grand whirl. Harry was supposed to be attending a medical convention, but I know that he spent far more time with me than he did discussing surgery. He told me he had arranged the magical switch of railroad tickets through the Pinkerton office. He had been a close

friend of Billy Pinkerton's, who had been his patient for many years and who had died, an old man, in his arms.

It struck us as simply astounding that he had lived in Chicago during those same days I was there, yet we had never happened to meet! This seemed a deplorable waste of good companionship. We had so much in common—knew so many mutual Chicagoans.

Perhaps in a way I did a bit of bragging about the list of my acquaintances. As a newspaperwoman I wasn't going to let the good doctor get ahead of me with "names" he knew—for I had been impressed with his Pinkerton connections. So, very casually, I said: "I know Al Capone. Would you like to meet him?"

"Sure," said Harry, "and Captain Kidd and Jack the Ripper too."

My "friendship" with Al Capone was not as much of a fib as my doctor friend may have believed. On the other hand, Al and I were not exactly like *that*, either. I had met him when I covered the Gene Tunney-Jack Dempsey fight. Jack knew Capone, and when I said I would like to meet the master gangster he introduced us. We had quite a talk, and I doubt if even the most chicken-hearted would have been "scairt" of Al on this occasion, since he talked mostly about his son and his family. He told me that one day he would give me an interview for my paper—an opportunity I had not taken advantage of until I suddenly decided to "show off" in front of Dr. Martin.

I remembered that Capone lived at the Metropole Hotel, so just as casually as though I were calling up for an appointment at the beauty parlor I rang the hotel and asked to be put through to Mr. Capone.

Four different people got on the wire and asked: "Who is calling?"—and four separate and distinct times I said,

"Louella Parsons." By then my courage wasn't exactly what it had been when I started the enterprise.

Suddenly, an almost alarmingly soft voice said: "Miss Parsons?"

"Yes," I replied. I had only said so four times!

"Al Capone speaking," said the gentle, almost weary voice.

In a great deal more of a flutter than I would admit I managed something about taking him up on that old promise of an interview. I said also that I would like to bring along a friend.

Was there a slight suggestion of a quiet laugh from the other end of the wire at the mention of a protective "friend"? I couldn't be sure, because the voice was politely level when he spoke again. It has always stayed vividly in my mind that there was something almost sleepy in Al Capone's voice, a hushed undertone, such as a man uses in a library or a sick-room. The tone quality was low and not unpleasant—but it played too persistently on one key.

Later, on the screen, I am sure that all our top movie gangsters, Edward G. Robinson, Jimmy Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, *et al.*, copied this vocal characteristic of Capone's.

He was not a man to waste words. "Tonight—for the interview?" he asked. I said that would be fine.

"Come early," he remarked gently. "I do not stay up late!"

Harry went along with me, still under the impression that the whole thing was something in the nature of a gag. When we arrived at the Metropole and went up to the desk, the clerk looked at us blankly.

"Al Capone doesn't live here," he said.

With all the assurance of a gangster's moll I looked him in the eye and said, "Yes, he does. He is expecting me. I just talked to him. I would advise you to call room 408!" That ought to get him! It did!

I couldn't look at my Irish doctor friend as we rode up in the elevator on our way to meet the most famous—or infamous—racketeer of his time. I was beginning to worry that perhaps I had “shown off” a little too effectively.

We rapped on the door of 408 quietly, as though we were two top conspirators ourselves. A man came and looked at us through a panel. A second man came. The third man, after giving us the once-over, opened the door.

If it all sounds like a typical movie—remember this: The movies copied Capone's methods—not he theirs! His “system” was the pattern of many a racketeer film later to be produced.

Capone was sitting in a combination office-sitting room. It was the typical cheap “parlor” of a hotel suite made more personal by several photographs of friends or relatives, and a large, elaborately framed one of his son. The gangster chief was a dark, squat man, under medium height, but immaculately groomed in a soft gray suit. His eyes were small but rather pleasant. It was his mouth that was his bad feature—too full, purple rather than red in color, and his lips shone so they seemed to be polished. Purple too was the scar on his cheek which gave him his nickname. With a slow, unhurried, but cordial manner he rose and came over and shook hands with us.

If he realized we were ill at ease he gave no indication of it. With the poise of an actor he launched into one of his gentle dissertations—this time about some antiques and art treasures he had just received from Europe. And then, ever the proud and doting father, he began to talk about his little boy and how much the youngster liked to ride in Lincoln Park in the early morning.

The more Capone talked the more obvious it became to both his nervous guests that there was absolutely no thought in his mind that he had ever done a thing to harm society.

His manner was exactly that of an injured businessman of to-day, not getting his just deserts from the New Deal, when he brought up the subject of his dog races—complaining bitterly that he was being discriminated against by the Chicago newspapers!

"That paper that runs your column, the *Chicago Herald Examiner*," he said petulantly, "is particularly bad to my dog races. Look at the play they give the horse races. Why do they ignore my dogs?"

I replied meekly that I did not know.

"Well," said Capone in that level tone that was beginning to get on my nerves, "*you are the girl who can fix it!* Speak to the editor about it!"

It was not a request. Al Capone wasn't used to asking favors. It was a muted order. And suddenly I realized why he had so quickly granted my request for an interview. Mr. Capone could use me!

I thought it was high time to change the subject. "I'm only here in Chicago for another day," I offered in what I hoped was a co-operative tone. "I'm just stopping over on my way from Los Angeles to New York."

"Los Angeles!" said Al, with as much venom as his subdued voice could muster. "There's a lousy town!" Whereupon our injured host went on to explain that he, too, had once paid a little visit to Los Angeles which didn't last as long as he had hoped, because of the hot breath of the district attorney on his neck.

The entire trip had been a fiasco, he explained sadly. In making his unceremonious departure he had forgotten to get in touch with someone he had wanted to see. Remembering this oversight when he was on the train speeding back to Chicago, he gave a man \$100 cash to send a telegram for him.

The stranger had, unfortunately, turned out to be a news-

paperman. Instead of sending the telegram to the Capone aide he sent it to the police. When the train pulled into Joliet, Capone added wistfully, he was arrested—one of those numerous, troublesome arrests that didn't take.

"What burned me up," he said gently, "was that the guy kept the hundred dollars. The cheap crook!"

CHAPTER VIII

I WAS THOROUGHLY ENJOYING my two days' flirtation with Dr. Martin. I never expected to see him again after I left Chicago. A more attractive, attentive, or amusing man I had never met. But, I told myself, that was all there was to it.

Fate must have been having her own private chuckle at my carefully arranged plans. The day I was to leave the Windy City I lunched with Harry, and then, in the usual mad dash to the station (someday I am going to make a train on time just to see how it feels), I lost my tickets. Not only the tickets to New York—but also my reservations to Houston, Texas, for the Al Smith Democratic Convention and my return ducats to California—about \$400 worth in all.

This necessitated innumerable long-distance calls to Harry in Chicago enlisting his aid in finding my lost, strayed, or stolen railroad tickets. It seemed the good doctor was not to be put out of my life so casually after all.

He proceeded to call me in New York with every new development of the accursed search. And with the devilish luck of the Irish he managed invariably to get hold of me when I was in the company of THE MAN in my life. Let us go to

luncheon—and immediately I was paged “long distance.” Chicago calling! If we visited the apartments of friends, the same thing happened.

After going into great detail about the tickets, finally recovered through an “ad” in the newspapers, Harry tormented me by asking, “Do you love me?”

I would sputter and stammer under the decidedly green eyes of my friend. He finally said: “Who is that pest? Never mind—don’t tell me. But I’m telling you if you see or talk to him again, I’m through. I’ll never forgive you.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the telephone rang. “Just wanted to tell you,” came the jovial voice of Harry, “I’m swinging up to Oregon on a fishing trip before returning to California. I’ll see you in Hollywood, darling!” Whew! As much as I wanted to be with my daughter and with the man of my heart, it was cool, restful relief when, on the hottest day I can remember, I boarded the Convention Special for Texas.

Jimmy Walker chartered a private car to bear himself and all the Tammany bigwigs to Houston, and I was the only woman aboard that Convention Special.

What a jaunt that was! What laughs, what an enormous amount of fun we all had. Jimmy, who usually got up at around four o’clock in the afternoon, would make an appearance on the back of the car, as we went through the little Southern towns, elegantly garbed in pale green pajamas, a handkerchief showing correctly from an initialed pocket. His impromptu speeches were masterpieces of political sagacity embroidered with his own brand of wit. The crowds everywhere went wild over him. Walker was as popular in those days and as well known as the Democratic candidate for the presidency, Al Smith.

I loved “queening” it along with these gay political blades.

My hosts paid me cavalier attentions, and I wouldn't have been a woman if I hadn't preened and enjoyed it to the utmost. I've always been as susceptible to flattery as a child is to a candy stick. I can recognize it—but I love it.

Houston turned out to be hotter than the Hades described by Dante. But nobody cared. The bands played "Sidewalks of New York" in honor of Al Smith and "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" in honor of everybody else. Blasted out into the already torrid air were additional gusts of oratorical "hot air" from the speechmakers. It was a typical political convention in a holiday town.

What I didn't know about politics would fill a library, but in all truth I had not been sent to cover the convention from a political standpoint. Mr. Hearst had ordered me to cover the "woman's angle"—what the ladies were wearing, the social events, and other chit-chat much in the same vein in which my column is written:

But I have never been able to refrain from tossing a few rousing opinions of my own into my copy, and one day after I arrived in Houston I received the shattering word from my secretary that my precious column had been ordered out of the Hearst papers for the first time! What had I done? What awful *faux pas* had I committed?

It was maddening not knowing, but there was just stony silence from the Chief. The horrifying "ban" only lasted twenty-four hours, but it was my first personal taste of how closely William Randolph Hearst edits his newspapers and of what careful check he keeps on every department.

To this day I am not exactly sure what I wrote that riled the Chief. Later, when I recounted this experience to Arthur Brisbane, he said: "Why should you be upset over having one column kept out? I have had mine cut down to four or five lines—and even deleted entirely. Mr. Hearst owns the

papers, and he has a right to do what he wants to with the material he buys."

When I look back on those days and on the many heart-aches that come to anyone who has a job of this type, I am reminded of a postcard I once bought. It pictured a queer ancient character wearing a peaceful expression—a caption carried these pithy words: "I am an old man and my greatest worries have never happened."

Most of mine have never happened either—but I still suffer acutely at the slightest vestige of criticism from those I love or admire. A little mistake on my part can throw me into an agony of worry.

But once I was back in the good graces of the Chief and was again regularly appearing in print I snapped back into my usual form of having more fun for the show than anybody else!

Al Smith was duly chosen Democratic candidate—as everyone well knew he would be—and Jimmy Walker announced that instead of returning to New York he was going to continue on to Hollywood for a little vacation. With a hand-picked group of his favorite cronies—and with me once again in the party—we started back to the land of sunshine, sunkist oranges, and movie stars.

Of course, Hollywood took Jimmy to its heart immediately. There were parties galore for him—one of the most important tossed by the Breakfast Club. Sitting between Jimmy and the man-of-my-life (who had flown out from New York for a few days), I suddenly happened to look up—and right into the crinkled, blue eyes of Dr. Harry Watson Martin, beaming at me like a little private satyr from his chair at a conspicuous table! *That man* again. My heart gave one little glad leap before a half-smile froze on my face.

What if my irate friend from New York should suddenly

divine that the jovial Irishman, now waving broadly at me, was the man whose existence he was beginning to hate?

When I returned to Margaret Ettinger's house after the breakfast the telephone rang. I didn't need three guesses. One did it. "How are you?" said Harry. "How about having dinner with me?"

I said I thought I had better not. "Well," he laughed, "I'll try again—after the Walker party, *and your friend*, returns east."

And call he did—and see him I did—after my friend left for New York! There was no resisting the doctor. He was so gay, so unfailingly good-humored, so thoughtful. From the beginning he told me that he intended to marry me. "I have made up my mind," he would laugh; "you have no choice in the matter."

Perhaps, at the start, this was all good-natured joking on his part. But as we saw more of one another—and soon it seemed I was seeing him almost daily—I began to realize how important he was in my life.

He was so understanding. So unfailingly sweet. One day Harry said to me: "Neither one of us is worth your worries" (meaning himself and the man in New York). "He loves you. I love you. But the way we feel is unimportant. It is up to you to decide where your real happiness is. If it is with the other man I love you well enough to take it. But I hope it will be me!"

I knew then—if I had not suspected it in my heart before—that I loved Harry.

It is all right for a woman to go along with her career, thinking it can take the place in her life of a home and a husband, for a little while. But the years have a way of sneaking by. Even the gayest success path can be a lonesome road—if a woman is alone. There has to be someone who matters, and to

whom you matter, or all the luck and breaks in the world are not worth two tinkers' damns.

Even in the busy, crowded years before I met Harry I knew I had been lonely. I had found love—but it was not the kind of love that could ever spell the security and happiness I wanted.

I told Harry I would marry him as soon as I could talk to the other man and tell him the type of man I was going to marry. But the Other Man didn't want to hear about the kind of man I was marrying!

I knew then that that chapter which had lasted so many years was ended. The old love died gently and with respect—after the first bitterness wore off.

The new love, I was confident, would never die. And I have never had reason to alter that opinion.

Harry and I were married January 4th, 1930, after a year's engagement. Harriet came out from the East to be my maid of honor. She looked so pretty and grown up in her pale blue chiffon and large picture hat. Any fears I might have had that she would be upset over my marriage because we had been so close, more like pals than like mother and daughter, were groundless. "Your happiness is the really important thing," she said. William Connery, an old friend of Harry's from Chicago, was his best man.

My small apartment at the Villa Carlotta was filled to the corners with friends I had made and loved. Norma Talmadge, Constance Talmadge, Lila Lee, Bebe Daniels, Ben Lyon, the George Fitzmaurices, Paul Whiteman, Rita and Al Kaufman, Danny Danker—then a gay young bachelor—Ross Shatuck, an artist who was later to marry my cousin Margaret—were all smiling faces at my wedding—the happiest day of my life and the beginning of the happiest era of my life as Mrs. Harry Watson Martin!

CHAPTER IX

AS EARLY AS 1926 there had been the faint ripple of a new-fangled thing called SOUND lapping the sides of the Good Ship Movies. But so amateurish were the gurgles and gasps that I contend, to this day, that only the financially distressed Warner Brothers—who had to swim or sink by their novelty the Vitaphone—foresaw the great tidal wave of Talking Pictures breaking over the fifth largest industry in America.

That tidal wave was to come in devastating force before the end of 1929. In its wreckage lay the careers of great silent stars, pretty little dumbbells, big and little directors, and even producers who could not cope with the new god, Microphone!

It was on August 7, 1926, that the desperate Warners boldly previewed a group of Vitaphone shorts at the Warner Theater in New York. There was no dialogue in these featurettes ranging from opera to comedy—it was too early for that. But there was a lot of disconcerting musical noise in the background, blasting out suddenly when the sound track got out of hand, and then ebbing away to a whisper when least expected.

Always the prophet and the herald of things to come, I quickly foresaw the doom of Talking Pictures—and said so. My exact comment was: "I have no fear that scraping, screeching, rasping sound film will ever disturb our peaceful motion-picture theaters. The industry is too wise to spend fortunes for machines, new equipment, and sound stages to project noise that the customers do not want to hear. The public has no intention of paying good money to be so annoyed!"

But I wasn't alone in my foresightedness. Joseph M.

Schenck, who was highly regarded as the mouthpiece of motion pictures, went on record as saying: "Sound is a fad and will not endure beyond a few brief motion pictures."

Later, I was just as bright a girl about color. In the first color film I ever saw the horses looked like striped peppermint candy, the sunsets resembled poached eggs over Texas, and most of the players appeared biliously green and definitely not on the alkaline side. So I buried color along with sound with the observation: "A mere fad."

And then what happened? Just this—on May 24, 1927, George Jessel, who was between brides at the time, flatly put his foot down and refused to appear in the Vitaphone special, *The Jazz Singer*, arguing that he was contracted to appear only in dignified silent films! Al Jolson was rushed into the breach, and overnight an industry was revolutionized—heads fell and bodies lay strewn in the wake of one of the greatest box-office hits of all time. The Talking Pictures were here to stay!

Surrounded though I was by my shattered little prophecies, I was far luckier than many great movie stars. I could eat my words. They had to speak theirs—and too many of the best of them couldn't.

Voice and drama teachers, among them Josephine Dillon, Clark Gable's first wife, sprang up like mushrooms on the Hollywood scene. Stars abandoned night clubs and swimming pools to pore long hours over scripts, turning as trustfully as little children to diction coaches. Girls whose chief stock in trade was sex, optical but not oral, were no longer able to command their royal salaries. Stage favorites began to arrive from New York on every train. Chaos and confusion reigned on every front as studios uprooted old buildings to make way for streamlined sound stages. And in the stampede many heads were sacrificed that need not have been lost, with a little more

care and consideration and not so much frantic bowing down before the little god, "Mike."

John Gilbert and Greta Garbo, in such silent pictures as *Flesh and the Devil*, had become the great lovers of the movies. In one fell swoop—to be exact, a dreadful movie called *His Glorious Night*—Jack was ruined. It has been said, and is now accepted almost as legend, that the great Gilbert had a falsetto voice that ill became his manly physique and that audiences tittered when he spoke.

While Jack's voice wasn't so deep as the ocean, it was a thoroughly normal speaking voice. But in those days there was little "mixing" or regulation of sound. If the microphone was pitched along the leading lady's favorite key the hero sounded "way up there" with her, too.

I will always believe that his heartbreak over his shattered career killed Jack literally, just as the little mike had killed him professionally. Garbo, the love of his life, stage-trained in Sweden before coming to America, weathered the Talkies. Several years later, though their torrid romance was in ashes, Garbo insisted that Gilbert make a comeback movie with her, *Queen Christina*, and he was much better because sound had improved. But it had eaten deeply into his fiery, impetuous heart that his subjects had deserted the King when he needed them. The fire and the heart had gone out of Gilbert. A few years later, soon after his marriage to Virginia Bruce, John Gilbert died of a "heart attack."

Other silent-day favorites, especially those who could sing, had little to worry about. Bebe Daniels scored decisively in *Rio Rita* with John Boles. Norma Shearer, under the expert guidance of her husband, Irving Thalberg, and a famed drama coach, stepped forth as the first lady of the screen. Mary Pickford, who had a childhood stage career back of her, made *Coquette* and won the first Academy Award statuette. Doug-

las Fairbanks, too, hailed from the stage and came riding into greater glory on the wave of sound in his swashbuckling adventure films. On the other hand, Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd took temporary back seats. Charlie's chief hold on movie audiences had been his potent pantomiming—and his cultivated English accent set badly on the shoulders of the inarticulate little tramp figure he had created.

In addition to the new successes and the new wrecks, there was considerable polite and highly secret "fudging" going on. Virginia Bruce, as Jenny Lind in *P. T. Barnum*, was a sensation until some meanie disclosed that the beautiful voice belonged to an off-stage singer!

As if sound had not done enough to Hollywood, it proceeded to create additional havoc with the foreign-accent market. Charlie Chaplin's silent movies still retained their worldwide market popularity. But a new hero, Clark Gable, had sprung up, and it was imperative to keep him flying under all flags. Somebody promptly had the brilliant idea of dubbing screen stars' voices in French, Spanish, German, and Italian.

Babel itself had no greater problems to wrestle with than afflicted Hollywood with the coming of the great mechanical toy TONGUE!

2

I cannot truthfully say that the coming of sound, with all its fury, literally drove Harry and me out of our honeymoon apartment at Nellie Ince's "Villa Carlotta." Heaven knows the floor space was hardly large enough to accommodate our worried and harrassed stellar friends—and the little office I had set up in the dinette rapidly turned into a liaison spot for press agents, acting as diplomats, begging me to print no word that might reflect on a good, paying client's speaking voice.

Careers were shaky, and every printed word that was not a bouquet was interpreted as a brickbat. Frankly, I believe this was the beginning of the legend of the "Parsons power" whereby, with a slight flick of the typewriter, I was credited with being able to save or ruin 'em.

I have more to say about myself in the guise of a reportorial Hatchet Woman anon, but first let me go on about the traffic problem. Harry and I solved it by taking our combined capital—it amounted to exactly \$7000—and putting it down on a home in Beverly Hills on tree-shaded Maple Drive.

In addition to our first home we acquired a mortgage of \$20,500 and some charming antiques on the buy-as-you-earn plan. Harry might have been a restraining influence in my life and helped me overcome my tendency to regard money as something in liquid form to slip between the fingers. He might have. But he didn't.

What he earned as a successful doctor and what I made plying my syndicated trade seemed to melt miraculously into something on our backs, something to sit on, something to look at, or several yards of railroad tickets to points east or west.

During a spell when we could not in the least afford it we set off on a trip to Honolulu for the soul-satisfying reason that our best pals were heading that way. Carole Lombard had just married Bill Powell, and they were Hawaii-bound on their honeymoon. Warner and Winnie Baxter had passage on the same boat. So did Bebe and Ben Lyon and Norma Talmadge and Gilbert Roland. It was a trip to satisfy the souls of all luxurious beachcombers, and we did just what every tourist, pre-Pearl Harbor, has done in Honolulu. We lounged on the beach all day until we were nut-tan. We sunned on our *lanai* listening to the soft-voiced natives sing their plaintive chants. We wept softly when, decked with garlands of gardenias, we sailed out of the harbor to the haunting strains of "Aloha."

Harry and I returned broke, but happy and determined not to spend any more money except on draperies, maybe—and new dining room furniture and a few oil paintings—until we “caught up.”

So we economized with only a few trips to Agua Caliente—where we invariably lost, and consoled ourselves on the drives home by discussing a trip we would take to Europe later on, when we could afford it.

3

Perhaps it sounds as if my life was all play and no work. Such was far from the case. But it's true that I was under much less tension in those days. My column was the first to be syndicated directly from Hollywood, and in the beginning I had only myself to worry about as competition, so—although I worked hard—I never worried.

No other newspaper had yet sponsored a syndicated column of movie gossip—but other movie writers were beginning to appear on the scene. *Variety* began to put out a daily, edited by Arthur Ungar, that contained movie news. *The Hollywood Reporter*, created by William Wilkerson, had not yet been born when I arrived in Hollywood. Edwin Schallert was writing reviews on the *Los Angeles Times*. It was not until the *Los Angeles Examiner*, in which my column appeared, took a big jump in circulation that Schallert was given a regular movie news column.

The only other daily column on motion pictures was written by Grace Kingsley, who confined herself almost exclusively to reporting the social activities of players dear to her heart. How Gracie loved to write up the luncheon crowds at the old Montmartre Café, the dinner parties the Tom Mixes gave, and the barbecues at the big Harry Carey ranch! Grace

was a kindly, motherly person who took notes copiously, and she was well loved and utterly fearless of the movie great. I think the only person Grace ever feared was Harry Carr, the editorial writing boss of the *Times*, who was as caustic as he was opinionated.

Harry sponsored a rotogravure section on that paper, and with fear and trembling the movie stars would read what he had to say about their plays and performances. Carr is dead now—so it is safe to say that his bark was much worse than his bite. He would never tolerate any such sentimental comment being made about him if he were alive.

Frankly, I wasn't too worried about my Los Angeles competition. It was strictly local, whereas my column was appearing in papers in this country, France, South America, and Mexico. However, just to be safe, I laid down a rule that I was to have all the news exclusive—that it was useless to me if it appeared in any other newspaper. And as long as I can tear out a telephone by the roots making myself heard that rule will stay in effect—or, as the boys say, "Parsons is on the warpath again."

Movie "scoops" have been, and still are to me, the breath of my job. Say or think what you will about my talents as a writer, pro or con (and a great deal has been said *con*)—but question my reportorial ability and them's fighting words! I am proud of being a good reporter. Getting a beat on a big Hollywood story is the zest of my job—and possibly the breath of my life.

I have been too long on my job and it has meant too much to me ever to grow casual about it—ever to shrug my shoulders at Hollywood news. To me—as to millions of film fans—the people who make up Movietown are some of the most glamorous personalities on the world stage. Since I started reporting their doings two great wars have afflicted mankind, saddened

hearts everywhere and left them heavy. Some people are prone to say, "What does it matter what happens in Hollywood when so much is happening in the world outside that is so much more important?"

I would like to say to these people that it is impossible to look on the faces of the youngsters in uniform who pass through Hollywood on their way to the Pacific fronts, see the glow of interest and affection that lights their eyes when they meet a movie player, and still say that the glamorous people of Hollywood have not meant much in their lives.

These boys in Uncle Sam's service have spent many happy hours watching the Cinderellas of the movies. They have read about them—and know their love stories and life stories as well as they know the girl's next door. Stars are as familiar to most young Americans as some loved fiction characters—and many fine men and women among them deserve the acclaim and affection they have won.

From the moment I put my first by-line on a movie column I have been proud of my job. And there isn't anything I couldn't or wouldn't do to get another Parsons "scoop"—well, *hardly* anything!

Some of the orneriest stories I have ever read about myself are concerned with my efforts in getting a scoop. I am accused of using everything from blackmail to a blackjack to get an exclusive story.

I have always felt that getting a scoop is the result of one part news sense, one portion of Black Magic, and a dash of the accidental. The biggest scoop I ever got—and it has been called the biggest news story ever to break from Hollywood—was the parting of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, then the great lovers of the world, the 20th Century Romeo and Juliet.

4

It had been common "inside" knowledge for a long time that Douglas Fairbanks, gay, bronzed Doug who smoked cigarettes chain-fashion and who preferred leaping over chairs to sitting on them, was taking many trips without Mary. He went to the Orient, he dashed to the South Seas, he mixed with the gay set on the Riviera, while Mary, it seemed, preferred to remain at Pickfair.

But no one suspected a rift or even held a suspicion that the great lovers, Pickford and Fairbanks, would ever part. They were Hollywood royalty. They stood for too much.

One day Mary, Frances Marion, the scenario writer, Mary's cousin, Mrs. Sonny Chaliff, and I were lunching. We were all good friends. We met often for luncheon.

The conversation had been devoted to feminine trivia—although I thought Mary, who was usually so bright and sparkling, seemed depressed, under some sort of strain. Frances suddenly said: "Tell Louella, Mary. Confession is good for the soul."

If I live to be a thousand I shall never forget Mary's answer. Without the slightest show of dramatics, without a telltale tear in the eye or clutched handkerchief in the hand, she said in a level voice:

"Douglas and I are separating. It's just—over."

For the moment, I was too shocked to think—much less to speak. When I could finally collect myself I said, "Mary, have you thought about this? Are you sure it isn't just a misunderstanding that can be patched up? It's unthinkable."

"I have thought about nothing else," she said. "I am sorry, but I do not see what else I can do. Louella, you are an old

friend. You may write the story. The sooner it is known—and over—the better.”

For two hours I talked to her. I knew I had the biggest divorce story in the history of Hollywood, but I loved Mary, and my friendship for her was deeper than my reportorial instinct at that moment.

“I’ll write it,” I told her, “and telephone you—and if you change your mind I won’t print it.”

But she didn’t change her mind—and when I realized that nothing in heaven or on earth could change it for her, I wrote the scoop that hit front pages of newspapers all over the world.

Ah, yes, my friends—I connived to keep it exclusively exclusive! I maneuvered to hold up the story until the final edition of the Los Angeles *Examiner* on a Saturday night. That was the zero hour when the rival typesetters would not be on the job—a fact well known to me. For hours, after my story broke Sunday morning, no other news service could catch up with us!

The storm that raged through every editorial room in the country was of cyclonic intensity. Poor Mary! Reporters camped on her lawn at Pickfair and even followed her to church, urging her to deny my story to save their own faces. She telephoned me in despair.

“Tell them I hit you over the head and forced you to give me the story,” I told her. “Tell them anything to save yourself.”

But honest little Mary told them no fibs. She merely reiterated with dignity that it was true—that she and Douglas were parting and that she was sorry if any of them had been hurt by the way the story broke.

The press was bitter—not so much toward Mary, I am happy to say, as toward me. The most popular and well-circulated

story of how I got the Pickford-Fairbanks scoop was relayed to editors all over the country.

It was said that I had been unscrupulous enough to tell Mary that Douglas was paying a great deal of attention to a titled lady in London. In her rage and heartbreak (it was embroidered) Mary broke down before me and announced her separation without even consulting Douglas.

The truth is that I had never heard of the "titled lady" at that time, and not until her "titled" husband later sued for divorce did I suspect that she existed. This was some months after Mary had announced that she and Doug were through, and, while I would like to say that I have occasionally abetted "scoops" by foreseeing them in my private crystal ball, this is one I would never have dreamed about.

To be lofty about it—no scoop in the world is worth telling a woman something that will break her heart.

To be practical—I knew nothing to tell Mary—until *she* told *me*—and gave me the biggest story of my career.

To be truthful—there was far more of the Parsons luck involved in getting that story than any other reportorial factor.

CHAPTER X

A REPORTER WHO lets his personal views get in the way of a news story just isn't worthy of his profession. Second in importance to the Pickford-Fairbanks scoop in value to the International News Service customers of my column was the Charlie Chaplin marriage to eighteen-year-old Oona O'Neill.

What I think about this sensational romance between the fifty-four-year-old comedian and the debutante daughter of

America's foremost playwright, Eugene O'Neill, is neither here nor there. It's his life—not mine. But, as a story following on the heels of Joan Berry's paternity suit against Chaplin, it was a honey, a natural, and the type of scoop dear to my heart, filled with intrigue, suspense, and outwitting the competition.

I have known Charlie for twenty-five years, and I suspect that he has just as much love of hocus-pocus as I have. Charlie loves to be the bride at the wedding, the cheer leader at the games. He also has a fondness for the spotlight even when he is in trouble.

Frankly, I was surprised when he called me out of the blue one fine day last June and asked if he could see me alone.

His arrival at my home was worthy of the best climax of a mystery book. For days the telephone service at the Chaplin home had received no incoming calls, since Charlie was refusing to make further statements about the Berry girl.

He insisted that his visit to my home must be so secret that even my secretary was not to know of his presence in the house. The butler he couldn't help. Somebody had to let him in!

Charlie was wearing dark glasses and as usual no hat atop his snow-white locks. Like a figure out of a book he tiptoed up the stairs, and it was not until we were closeted behind closed doors in a room upstairs that he told me he was going to give me the surprise of my life—the scoop of his marriage to Oona O'Neill.

For five days these secret calls and secret telephone messages between us continued in fine old style. I loved the excitement of "sitting" on the hottest story in Hollywood, but I have to tell the truth: It made a nervous wreck of me. I wanted to get my yarn in print as soon as possible, and I thought I would lose my mind if Chaplin did not complete his arrangements for the marriage and give me the "go" signal soon.

I was equally jittery during my meeting with Oona. I found

her an unusual-looking girl with an overwhelming adoration for Charlie. Unlike most prospective brides, she talked little about the usual feminine things like what she would wear for her elopement and other details dear to the bridal heart. Instead she discussed books and poetry and said that after she was married she wanted to completely overhaul Chaplin's library.

She had a great deal of dignity when she spoke of the legal troubles Charlie was facing. "I love him," she said with such deep sincerity that even the most cynical could not doubt her words. "I want to stand by him now that he is in trouble. Any woman would want to stand by the man she loves."

At long last came the word from Charlie that I could break my story! Only Ray Van Ettisch of the Los Angeles *Examiner* and Harry Crocker also of my paper were in on the secret besides myself. Never will I forget the way we planned and connived to keep our scoop. Ray was even afraid for my yarn to be put on the teletype into the *Examiner* or for it to be dictated over the telephone. A special messenger was dispatched to the house to pick it up, and I didn't breathe an easy breath until I saw the headlines next day—ours, all ours—with all the facts, dates, and place of the wedding while the competition came scraggling behind with bare surmises.

2

As may be judged from the Pickford-Fairbanks and Chaplin-O'Neill affairs, getting a scoop and keeping it bottled up are two separate and distinct departments. I won't say to what lengths I won't go to keep my stories under lock and key. But, to date, I have not committed murder.

One of the biggest stories I ever tied up was Mrs. Ria Gable's announcement that she was going to divorce Clark

Gable. I got it by practically keeping Ria under lock and key so that no other reporter could get to her until my story could break.

I had been tipped off that a settlement had been made between the Gables and that a divorce action would start within the week. Clark was in New York. When I telephoned him he was very frank in admitting that he and Ria had come to a parting of the ways. "But I wish you would get the story from her," he said. "I do not want to say anything that will embarrass her."

So I called Mrs. Gable and put the story squarely up to her, saying that Clark had verified it but preferred that she do the talking.

"I'll be right over," said Ria, and, scrupulous or not, I made up my mind right there that she was going to *stay* at my home until my story broke.

I never worked so hard to entertain a guest in my life! I sympathized with Ria ardently as she gave me her side of her marital woes, and when I finally sat down to my typewriter to peck it out I kept flatteringly asking her advice on how she wanted the story handled. I insisted that she stay for dinner, although she felt she should be going. Not if little Louella could help it!

We played cards. We talked clothes, and I even modeled two new hats I had just bought. We listened to a mutually favored radio program for an hour. But all evening long I kept a weather eye on the clock. A messenger had called early for my story, and "as time went by" I knew it was speeding across the wires. At long last, when I was sure no other wire service could catch up with us, I said "Good night" to the weary Mrs. Gable, who, to this day, probably doesn't know she was practically kidnaped by Parsons.

When a reporter from a rival syndicate finally was able to

contact her, after reading my story in print, he asked her where she had been all evening that she could not be reached.

"At Louella Parsons' house," Ria answered innocently.

"My God!" breathed the competition weakly.

I later had the Doris Kenyon-Arthur Hopkins divorce to myself because Doris came to dinner at my house and, in the course of the conversation, confided her unhappiness. She gave me permission to break the story—and once again I had no intention of letting my "scoop" get out of my sight.

"Doris," I suggested, "you are upset and unhappy. You shouldn't go home and be alone. Why don't you come with me [suggesting a party to which I had been invited] and forget your troubles?"

She did—but imagine my embarrassment when the story did not break in the early edition of the *Examiner*! In order to keep Doris—and the yarn—tied up for a later edition I took her home to spend the night with me!

It is one thing to outwit an innocent principal in a good yarn and quite something else again to outwit the ever-present studio publicity departments that handle their affairs in the fond hope of giving *all* the reporters a break on a big story.

Brazen honesty forces me to admit that I felt pretty pleased with myself when I outmaneuvered both the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer publicity department and the Warner Brothers press agency when Hedy Lamarr married John Loder not so long ago.

When Hedy was told that she had a few hours off the set of *The Heavenly Body* at Metro she made up her mind then and there to visit the marriage license bureau with John. She telephoned me to let me know her plans. But (it was one of the few times in my life I have been so careless) I had left the house without saying where I was going. Hedy called repeatedly and couldn't reach me.

When I finally returned, Ivy (who comes in for the day when our regular cook is off) met me with the news that I had had a dozen calls from "Hattie" Lamarr. Such is fame! Ivy saw no connection between "Hattie" Lamarr and glamorous Hedy—but I did. I had a hunch something was cooking—and I was worried sick.

The first person I called was my friend Andy Hervey, of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He, in turn, got busy trying to run down the exotic Viennese beauty for me. "I can't find her," he finally told me, dismay in his voice, "but if I do I'll sure let you know."

Just then in walked Hedy with John—right into my little parlor! "Here it is!" she said, waving her marriage license. "And where were you?" That wasn't important. But it was important that I keep these two headliners right at my house while I got the complete story of their marriage plans to my newspaper. Once again Parsons started the old stall game.

"This calls for some celebrating," I laughed, with what I hoped was just the right note of casual gaiety—after I had dictated their yarn to the City Desk. "We will have to open a bottle of champagne and toast the prospective bride and groom."

"First, I think I had better call the Warner publicity department," said John. He is under contract to Warner's, and players are well coached by their respective studios always to let the publicity departments break the important news. But I had other ideas.

"Oh, there's plenty of time for that," I stalled—and luckily few actors understand anything about deadlines. "We will have the champagne first."

John persisted, "But I think I should do Warner's the courtesy of—"

"Oh, darling," broke in Hedy, "do let's have a glass of cham-

pagne. Louella says there is plenty of time." I suppose I should have felt guilty. But I didn't.

Ivy came in and whispered in my ear: "Mr. Hervey done called again and he says he ain't heard nothing about where Miss Lamarr is. He says have you heard anything from her?"

"No!" I hissed back. "Not a thing! I haven't any idea where she is!"

We toasted the bride and groom-to-be out in the playroom until the paper called and asked if a photographer might come out to the house and take some exclusive pictures of the happy couple.

So while every local and syndicated reporter in town was out tracking down Hedy and John, there they sat in my living room having their pictures taken exclusively for the Los Angeles *Examiner*. It meant a three-hour jump on that story for my paper. And I loved it!

You can see by all this that it is only once in a blue moon that a scoop just accidentally drops into my lap.

One of the easiest was given me by Rita Hayworth when she made up her mind to divorce Ed Judson. Rita, vivid and glamorous, but the most repressed celebrity I have ever known, called me "out of the blue" and gave me the story of her rift with Judson. We had been good friends for several years. In some intangible way I have always felt sorry for the youngster. Seems odd to say that any woman would feel sorry for such a beauty of face and figure as Rita. Yet she is an unhappy little thing. And the various loves of her life—particularly Judson—have not made her happier.

I asked her, "Are you giving me the divorce exclusive, Rita?"

She answered, "Yes. We are friends, aren't we?" I'll always be grateful to her for that, and her very charming, agreeable manner probably made it possible for her to spend her eve-

ning at her own domicile. Otherwise I would doubtless have insisted upon keeping Rita "entertained" until I could break my story.

Where Hollywood loves, marriages, and divorces are concerned, I am getting to the point where nothing surprises me—not even such a wild threat as Marie Wilson's to the effect that she would kill herself if I broke the story that she was secretly married to Alan Nixon before she had had a chance to break the surprising news to her former fiancé, Nick Grinde.

Grinde was a young director to whom Marie owed much. He was madly in love with her, and the little blonde ingénue was so afraid of "hurting his feelings" that she had been continuing to have frequent dates with him, even though for three months she had been married to another man—Nixon!

I had no sooner promised Marie that I would hold the story of her marriage for twenty-four hours, giving her time to break the bad news to Nick, when one of Grinde's friends got me on the phone.

"Don't print that story," he wailed. "If you do, *Nick* will kill himself!"

"Marie just got through telling me the same thing," I said, and if that sounds cold-blooded, just remember that after years and years of chronicling these violent "passions" I have come to know my Hollywood, and my suicides, pretty well. Who was it who said, "Men have died and worms have eaten them—but not for love"?

Today both Nick and Marie are alive—and flourishing. And so am I!

3

The most difficult stories for me to write, both in the matter of heartache and back-break, are the long and sad "color" obituaries all newspapers use when a great star has died.

I suppose the memory of little Jean Harlow—impulsive, lovable, unhappy—Hollywood's first platinum blonde—will remain with me always. Tragedy seemed always to dog her footsteps. And it seems to me that every story that ever broke about Jean came into my life at a time when it was almost a physical impossibility for me to write.

En route to Europe on one occasion, Harry and I had flown to New York. I had no more than stepped off the plane than a representative from the *American* grabbed me by the arm and thrust a typewriter into my hand.

"Jean Harlow's husband, Paul Bern, has just committed suicide," he panted. "I have a typewriter here for you. Will you write us a story about Jean and your deductions on why Bern killed himself? What happened between Jean and her husband?"

Dizzy from the plane trip (for flying was not so comfortable then as it is today), shocked by this sudden word about the tragedy of Paul, who was a close friend, and worried about our boat connections, I sat down at the airport and pounded out my story.

I don't know whether I was prophetic or not, but some way I wasn't surprised when news came several years later that Jean had died. I knew she was very sick—I had been talking with her mother almost daily—and I knew that she didn't have the will to live. Life had struck her so many blows that she didn't seem to have the physical stamina to throw off her illness.

Jean was terribly, desperately in love with William Powell, and she wanted more than anything else to marry him. Bill wasn't well, and he couldn't see himself getting married just at that time. Jean used to sit with me and pour out her heart, so when she died—shocked as the whole world was, and sad as we felt that that bright young life should have ended too

soon—I couldn't help but feel that at least she had found peace.

When she died, an order came from the Chief himself to write the story of her life. "Have it ready to run serially the next day" was the order.

Dorothy Manners and I sat up for three nights with cold towels on our heads and black coffee to keep awake, pounding out the story. We didn't know what a good job we had done until later Joseph Connelly wired he was putting it into book form. I don't say it was fine writing, but I do say it was a good job when you consider under what stress we wrote it. It sold almost a million copies at ten cents a copy, and I still get fan mail asking where the book can be bought.

I was in Baltimore on a personal appearance tour when Douglas Fairbanks died. "Please start a series of seven articles on Douglas Fairbanks" came the order from the Chief.

What with writing my column and doing four shows a day at the theater, I didn't know how I could do it, but always there's a way. Dorothy wasn't there to help, so I stayed right at the theater and worked between stage appearances. I had very little material other than what I remembered of Doug, for the files of the Baltimore Hearst paper were mostly stories I had written myself. I found one interview I had written twenty-five years ago for the *Morning Telegraph* when Doug and I had gone shopping to buy neckties, and such trivia as that. I always work best under pressure, although it isn't easy to write life stories of people you've known and loved as well as I knew Douglas and little Jean.

Somehow Jean left a very large void in Hollywood, and as for Doug, there has never been anybody to take his place.

CHAPTER XI

ONE OF THE BEST SUMMARIES I have ever overheard about my disposition was delivered by my Negro butler, Collins, who was advising my new cook about what she might, and might not, expect of me as an employer.

"Miz Mahtin," said Collins, "is a lovely lady to work for—but *combustible!*"

This combustible element in my nature—and I admit it—has earned me a far-flung reputation for doing considerable hell-raising in my time. But critics of my unpredictable disposition do not know my personality as completely as does that fine old character analyst, Collins, who went on to say to the cook:

"She get mad as a hornet one minute and snap off your head. And then what do she do but change her mind in a hurry and put it back on again!"

My tempers, if violent, are short-lived—sometimes to an embarrassing degree. I can completely forget that I have just snapped off a head, and if I happen to run into my decapitated victim within the hour, lunching at Romanoff's, I innocently throw him into utter confusion by bowing cordially—our battle entirely gone from my memory.

But, unfortunately, many people do not share my theory that a flare-up clears the air. Although I am so constituted that I can kiss and make up in a minute—others are not. And so the legends of my feuds, both real and imaginary, have been gaily recounted for years, covering such divergent personalities as blonde, bee-stung-lipped Mae Murray and elegant, behatted Hedda Hopper.

Not counting minor skirmishes, I believe that the Murray was my first real whole-hearted feud. She became my antagonist in a vendetta that went on for years.

It started for the highly amusing reason that Mae hit the ceiling when Pola Negri married her brother-in-law, Prince Serge Mdivani. To this day I don't know whether Mae's pique centered in the fact that she wanted to be the only actress to marry into Georgian royalty, or whether she had just disliked me for a long time and seized on my story of the engagement of Serge and Pola as a chance to get me fired.

Pola had told me that she and Serge were sailing for Versailles, where she had a home at the time, and that they would marry there. She told me that she had known the Mdivani boys (David was married to Mae) in childhood, and it was a marriage that pleased both families.

I printed the story the day they sailed. Apparently everybody was happy except Pola's prospective sister-in-law, la Murray, who promptly hit the ceiling.

She wrote me that there wasn't a word of truth in my contention (it was Pola's) that Negri had known the Georgian Princes since childhood. She also wrote that I was a thoroughly unreliable reporter who never got my facts straight and that this was just another example of my unfounded reporting. I read the letter and promptly forgot the entire incident.

But Mae did not permit me to forget for long. She penned a similar letter to the boss demanding that my story be denied. I was told later that the reply from headquarters was: "We shall be glad to deny Miss Negri's engagement—but since she is to be married to Prince Serge tomorrow, such a denial would have but one place in our papers, and that would be in the comic section."

The letter must have been effective, for Mae stopped her

heckling. Years went by, marking various upheavals in Mae's career. But knowing how she felt about me, I must admit I was surprised when, not too long ago, I received a telephone call from her and she asked to borrow a little money! I am not a hard-hearted Hannah, and I hold no resentment against her. But I am not such a noble soul that I could see my way clear to lend her money, when for years she did everything in her power to make me wish I was anything but a movie writer.

2

I am supposed to "have it in" for Joan Crawford—a peeve, according to legend, that I have nursed for years because she failed to give me the scoop of her divorce from Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. The popular Parsons-Crawford fracas must certainly be tabbed as one of the most imaginary feuds of my career, since Joan *did* give me the story of that divorce—under extraordinary circumstances, I'll admit.

Joan and I have never been warm friends. We are not *simpatico*. I admire her, and yet I feel uncomfortable with her. To me, she is the personification of the Movie Star de luxe, the rags-to-riches Cinderella, the Lady Bountiful gowned by Adrian. She has done wonderfully kind things for friends down on their luck, and her coterie of admirers adore her. But I have always felt that the greatest performance of Crawford's career is Joan Crawford.

Although I had known her ever since she arrived in Hollywood, a 145-pound glamour girl who won one trophy after the other for her expert interpretations of the Charleston and the Black Bottom, we had never been especially close. Certainly not as close as Joan was to other writers, particularly Katherine Albert of the fan magazines.

When Joan realized that she and young Douglas Fairbanks,

Jr., had come to the parting of the ways, she naturally wanted to give her friend, Katherine, a break for her magazine.

But, unknown to anyone, Fate was to take a hand, and before the story could break in the movie book, electrifying both fans and Hollywoodians, young Doug was sued by the husband of an extra girl for alienation of affections.

Knowing nothing of the strained relations between the junior Fairbankses, I whipped up a whale of a sob story. I had Joan standing shoulder to shoulder with Doug through his troubles, staunchly defending their home, their happiness, and their marriage.

The story, written editorially, was a beauty. But it needed "quotes" to give it the right punch—so, as innocent as a newborn babe, I called Joan and told her I needed some devoted, little-woman quotes direct from headquarters.

Her reply was not enthusiastic. "I wish you would not print anything like that right now," she said. "If you will wait I will have another story for you."

I had been a newshound too long not to recognize the scent of a scoop. "I'll be right down," I said, and pretended not to hear her protestation that "this was hardly the time for a visit."

Two seconds later I was on my horse galloping to Joan's Brentwood home. She was distraught and upset—but not exactly "beside herself," as the saying goes. She had known as far back as when she gave Katherine Albert the scoop of her impending divorce for the magazine that she was leaving Doug. Now her big problem was that she was torn between loyalty to her friend and her canny knowledge that there would be "hell poppin'" if my sweetness-and-light yarn broke in a newspaper just five days before Katherine's magazine, with the divorce exclusive, reached the newsstands.

To her everlasting credit and my deep gratitude, Joan gave

me the true story—that she had made up her mind to divorce Doug long before he got into any difficulty.

I've never been a backward girl where a good story is concerned. This was one—and how! Right under my surprised hostess's eyes I grabbed her portable typewriter and started writing my yarn before the competition could arrive! Maybe I can only brag about beating the other newspapers by one bare edition—but that was enough! I did have the "beat," and the many stories written that I dislike Joan because she gave a magazine the first story of her separation are just so much sauerkraut. If the whole thing wasn't just plain old luck, however, I'll give my next scoop to Hedda Hopper.

3

It has always struck me as ironically amusing that one of the best little feud stirrer-uppers who ever hit Hollywood was Countess Dorothy Di Frasso, born Dorothy Taylor.

Strictly speaking, Dorothy does not belong to the movies as fish, fowl, or good red herring. But there are few other places in the world that have the magnetic power Hollywood has to attract unusual personalities. People well known on the Continent, who had formerly spent their winters on the French Riviera or in sunny Italy, began about ten years ago to migrate to Hollywood to mingle with the stars and movie folk. (Now Mexico City gets them all.)

But Dorothy arrived on the movie scene when the doors of hospitable movie homes were being thrown wide to the playboys and playgirls of the world, not always wisely perhaps, but always with gracious intent.

The first time I met Di Frasso she was full-blown and must have weighed close to 150 pounds. She had arrived in Hollywood in the wake of Gary Cooper, with whom she had gone

on an African safari. She was chic in spite of her weight (which she didn't retain long after sizing up Hollywood's streamlined sirens).

Dorothy most certainly made contacts. Married to an Italian of the nobility, but not working too hard at it, she brought with her a touch of the old world. She gave spectacular parties, she wore magnificent jewels. In the beginning everyone was captivated. In the end she had few friends because her tongue wagged incessantly and apparently no secret was safe with her. I never believed Dorothy was deliberately malicious. But she was eager to be entertaining, and in her fast-whirling social set nothing is ever more entertaining than the latest dirt.

At one of her most sensational parties Dorothy put dictaphones under the chairs and divans, and the upshot was that best friends heard their supposedly best friends commenting caustically on their clothes, boy friends, and peccadilloes—all of which was highly amusing to the hostess, but spread social havoc among the hapless victims.

But if Hollywood gave Dorothy something to talk about, Dorothy also gave Hollywood plenty to mull over. The stories about Di Frasso and Gary Cooper are many, varied, and all amusing. One of the most popular is that Cooper, who hailed originally from Montana and dressed the part, was taught by Dorothy to wear clothes like a Bond Street gentleman. His old flamboyant shirts, gaudy ties, and checked suits, relics of the days when he was devoted to Lupe Velez, were all put away, and in their place blossomed a gentleman's wardrobe, complete with handsome broadcloth tuxedos, tails, lounging suits, and cravats from London's smartest tailors.

Di Frasso, who never did anything half-heartedly, completely "did over" Gary sartorially. In truth she did such a good job that I think she "did" herself out of her friendship with Cooper. Quiet, restrained, and suddenly social, the former

cowboy unexpectedly up and married New York socialite Sandra Shaw, writing *finis* completely to the gay romance of the "Cowboy and the Countess."

But the exit of Cooper did not mark the end of Dorothy's Hollywood adventures. Always the unpredictable, she one day chartered a sea-going boat, and with a party of friends, including Mario Bello (Jean Harlow's one-time stepfather), his sweetheart, a nurse whom he later married, and Benny Siegel, well-known night-world character, started out on a "treasure hunt" that was to wind up on the front pages of every newspaper in the country.

First, the boat was almost wrecked, and I received a characteristic cable from Di Frasso reading: "YOUR GIRL FRIEND NEARLY DROWNED BUT IS SAFE AFTER TERRIFIC STORM." That storm at sea was mild compared to the tornado that followed in the wake of the so-called treasure hunt.

Later Benny Siegel was arrested and put in jail on charges of having been implicated in a famous gangster's murder. Hollywood held its breath—what would happen now? Practically everyone had met "Bugsy" through Dorothy, and it was undeniable that he had a certain social charm. (Later he was acquitted.)

This episode had a great effect, and Hollywood hosts and hostesses decided not to be so free in admitting people about whom they knew so little into their homes. Although Dorothy's name is anathema to some Hollywood folk today, I must say she and I never indulged in any personal feuding, and in spite of her sensational social career I like her. She was a gusty splash of color, as vivid as her magnificent blue sapphires, for many a dull day.

4

A name that will never fail to bring me to the boiling point is that of one Thomas Wood, whose by-line appeared on a story about me in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Wood did not, as a matter of cold fact later uncovered, even write the story. Nunnally Johnson, a top Hollywood writer and producer, actually authored the article, completely revamping a very botched-up job of Wood's. I still think Johnson is a good writer. What I think about Wood isn't to be printed.

He sailed under colors too false for my stomach. I gave Wood a job when he couldn't get one and material for a "profile" on me in the *New Yorker*. Harold Ross, editor of the *New Yorker*, and a friend of mine for years, wouldn't publish Wood's "profile" on me because it was so bad from a literary standpoint.

So when my "friend" Wood submitted the same material to the *Post*—they turned it back to Johnson for a rewriting job. For reasons of his own, Nunnally did not see fit to have that story printed under his own by-line, but played ball with Wood in using his material and agreeing that the story should be printed under Wood's name.

Since Johnson has absolutely nothing against me of a personal nature, I believe he was willing to author the smarty-pants article because he thought he was evening up a score for his old friend, Sidney Skolsky. For a short time Sidney had been syndicated by the Hearst papers, and when his contract was not renewed he told everyone he thought I had been responsible for his dismissal.

I like pint-sized Sidney and his Hollywood writings, and I had nothing to do with his dismissal—a fact he now knows. His main trouble came from editors who insisted on cutting

his copy to the bone, something which Skolsky railed and ranted about and which led to too much friction. But, evidently, Johnson thought Sidney had been done a bad turn by Parsons, and he set out to make me as ridiculous as possible in print.

What particularly bothers me about these pannings from the experts is that they all use the same old hackneyed material. They tell the same ancient stories over with glee. I am vague. . . . I am pompous. . . . I split infinitives. . . . I mix metaphors. . . . I am grabby. . . . I am spoiled. . . . I "queen it."

If they would only come to me I would like to give them some fresh material—along those same lines, if they prefer—but fresh!

Last year a book by Leo Rosten, on Hollywood, which was widely advertised as an authentic history of motion pictures, created quite a stir. If Mr. Rosten is a research student, then I am Dr. Millikan. In place of making even the slightest effort to meet me and perhaps get some first-hand material from Parsons about Parsons, he chose the easy route—and the popular one. He merely copied all the stories that had ever been printed against me.

He naïvely relates an old chestnut—that has been told and printed so many times I cannot understand why he delicately omitted my name from the incident. He reports that a "certain columnist" had the misfortune to have her Christmas presents stolen out of her car one year "after collecting them from the studios" (to quote Mr. Rosten's book) "and then insisted on having them all replaced!"

The gentleman does not know me. I don't do things on a cheap scale. I would never collect gifts in my own car. The studios would have to deliver them to my home!

Henry Luce is another who dearly loves to resurrect dusty

old legends whenever he feels called upon to mention my name in either *Time* or *Life* magazine. I do not know Henry Luce from Adam, and he does not know me from Eve. Ah, perhaps he does—for his pet method of referring to Parsons is to preface her with a long string of adjectives beginning with *p*, preferably *plump*, *pompous*, *prattling*—and may I suggest for future use, if the boys run short, *poisonous*?

Not knowing Mr. Luce even by sight, I do not know whether he is lovable, ludicrous, or libelous—but what the *L*—he certainly has never been known to give Parsons a break. An awful picture that was taken of me when I was recuperating from tuberculosis continually appears as a “cut” whenever he decides to run one of his plump girl friend.

It is not pleasant to have fun poked at your appearance in national magazines. I do the best I can with what nature gave me to work with. My skin isn't bad, and I have a good hair-line—but after reading a description of myself in a Luce publication I feel like something out of a horror movie.

I have never complained to Luce or to any of his editors when they have made fun of my contours. The only time I ever felt like putting on my own brass knuckles was in connection with the Louella Parsons Day in Dixon, my old home town. Although this festivity had been planned a year in advance, *Time* insisted that I am such a meanie I staged it to take away from the glory of another columnist who was making a “personal” at the same time in a near-by spot. As you may have guessed, the lady I was supposedly doing out of her honors was my old friend, Hedda Hopper.

5

If I hated Hedda as much as I am supposed to I would have to devote my entire time to it—and I have a living to make.

She is not, as one person recently commented, "the rival of my life," because Hedda has not been in the columning business that long.

There are now 312 motion-picture columnists who have sprung up since I started my movie column thirty years ago—some good, some bad, some imitating my style, others imitating someone else. But it is the popular belief that of the entire 312 I most thoroughly hate Miss Hopper's intestines—and she, mine.

It is sometimes difficult for me to see this well-publicized feud in its proper light. I read everywhere that Hedda and I are at each other's throats, editorially speaking, and in each other's hair, socially speaking.

I have known Hedda a long time—as far back as the New York days when, as Mrs. DeWolf Hopper—the actor's fourth or fifth wife—she was a stage actress, young, handsome, and with great poise and sophistication. Also, she was smartly groomed. I remember particularly admiring her hats.

Right now I am not so enchanted with her chapeaux. There was *the* night when she blew into Ciro's wearing a hat that looked like a house and garden atop her head and which featured, as a sort of added rural note, a little garden gate, ajar, on the brim! She has another little number with a neon band—or what looks like a neon band—proclaiming her name even in a blackout. I would never compete with Hedda on hats. She wins hands down—the Maddest Hatter of them all.

There was a time when Hedda was an actress in the movies having her ups and downs, and we were pretty good friends. I used to write pieces in the paper recommending her for certain roles. Once, when luck was against her, she was driven into the agency business. She wrote me a letter saying she thought she had a radio job for me. But the deal never went

through. Either I was a terrible "artiste" or Hedda was a terrible agent.

I was amused not so long ago at the quandary a certain studio managed to wiggle into when both Hedda and I accepted an invitation to attend the same luncheon.

The entire publicity department, perspiring en masse, decided the only solution was to keep us as far apart as possible. Heaven knows what they thought we would do!

The collective expression on the publicists' faces was something to see when Hedda and I arrived about the same time and spent the rest of the luncheon talking animatedly about the varied and assorted Hollywood "cabbages and Kings," including our nervous hosts.

Frankly, I do not know whether Hedda and I "like" one another or not. So many people say we do not. Who are we to argue against such an enthusiastic majority opinion?

CHAPTER XII

THE LURKING "HAM" in my make-up, a frustration since childhood, did not come into its own until 1931, when I found myself the holder of a thirteen-week contract for the radio, sponsored by the Sunkist Orange Company.

During the next six years I turned "professional" to my heart's content, with four years on the famed Hollywood Hotel program on the air, a brief fling in the movies as myself in Warner's *Hollywood Hotel* (but not brief enough), and a couple of personal appearance tours as an actress of sorts with two sets of Hollywood starlets accompanying me.

Heaven knows I was not built for a career as an actress—

in more ways than one. But I love the spotlight as ardently as though I were a combination of Duse, Kate Smith, and Dorothy Thompson. My lack of outstanding talent has never dimmed my enthusiasm—except when I saw myself for the first time on the screen. That was too much—much too much!

When I signed with the Sunkist Company—at the suggestion of my old friend Danny Danker—it was before the movie people were fully cognizant of radio's potentialities. The deal called for a fifteen-minute show in which I was to interview movie stars, and the idea was decidedly something new on the air.

The first broadcast for Sunkist went on in February 1931, with good old Wally Beery as the guest star. It was fitting that Wally should be the first, since I had known him longer than almost any other star. Our friendship dated back to the good old days of Essanay.

I was frankly terrified of the microphone and told Wally the way I felt. "Come up to my house," he suggested kindly, "and we will rehearse."

What a change had come over my old friend since the time when he was playing "Swedie," the servant girl in a series of one-reel comedies. The leading character star of the screen, and undoubtedly one of Hollywood's richest actors, Wally had mellowed into a devoted family man who worshiped the ground his little adopted daughter, Carol Ann Beery, walked on. Two beautiful women had loved and married Wally—Gloria Swanson and Rita Gilman. They were both sophisticated, charming women of the world, and much of their refining influence had rubbed off on my former "diamond-in-the-rough" friend.

Certainly there was no vestige of roughness in Wally's elaborate Beverly Hills home—a huge, sprawling edifice of pure white, daintily surrounded by pale pink geraniums and

latticed with pale blue shutters. "Kinda sissy color scheme for a bohunk like me," grinned Wally sheepishly. "But Carol Ann likes it." That was final. Anything Carol Ann likes is law with Wally.

He made me say my lines in the script over and over. He advised me patiently about the all-important radio *must*—correct breathing. Nothing is more difficult for the novice to master. A quick intake of breath in the wrong place can sound like a storm blowing up over the microphone!

Ten minutes of "talk" on the air (the other five were allotted to music and commercials) doesn't sound long. But sometime try talking entertainingly for ten minutes with nary a pause to relax you!

The music on our show was furnished by Raymond Paige and his orchestra. Later, Raymond and I were teamed again on two different programs on the air—and I feel he has always been lucky for me.

But I had other ideas in those days. When Sunkist was launched, for better or for worse, over the ether, I considered Raymond a mean encroacher, a stealer of time, and we spent three quarters of our lives trying to outwit each other. For a time things were in my favor. Then the worm turned!

Constance Bennett was my guest on the particular occasion of the worm-turning. She was to discuss fashions, and since she had just been named as one of the ten best-dressed women she was talking about a subject she knew and loved. What Connie had to say couldn't have been told in an hour, much less a mere ten minutes. So, paying no heed to Raymond's signal that it was his "turn," Connie and I went blithely on talking clothes to our hearts' content.

And what did my orchestra-leading friend do? Saying not a word, he and his orchestra quietly stole away into another studio—taking the sound men with them. Connie and I talked

on and on—into empty air. What did Ray care! His part of the show was being broadcast—not mine. Feeling we had done a great job, Connie and I went home satisfied with our day's work.

Then came the fireworks! Gloria Vanderbilt and Lady Milford Haven, Connie's house guests, had been listening to "our" program at her home.

"What happened?" they asked her. "You stopped in the middle of a sentence and Raymond Paige's orchestra took over." When Connie phoned me to this effect I pooh-poohed the idea. "Your radio must have been out of order," I explained innocently. Then came a flood of calls—my husband's, Margaret's, Bebe Daniels'. When they all told the same tale about Ray's "cut-in" I knew I had been foxed—but good!

Never was there a program with such a glittering array of stars—and such a waste of good talent. Mary Pickford, bless her, agreed to make her first appearance on the radio with me. She sponsored the presentation of four carloads of oranges to be sent to the drought sufferers in Arkansas. Bebe Daniels sang for us, Richard Dix talked about Western movies. Norma Shearer, "the First Lady of the Screen," did an interview.

Norma did not like the script I had written for us, and I couldn't blame her. Neither did I. The very afternoon we were to broadcast, she called for a huddle in her dressing room and we proceeded to revamp the script. I admit to being a frustrated "ham," and I believe decidedly that Norma is a frustrated writer. Fan magazine writers who have submitted stories to her before publication frequently crop up with very red faces when Norma returns them all but completely rewritten.

But she had good ideas and was really excellent on our show. The Sunkist owners were so charmed with her that they

invited their wives to meet her, and after the broadcast a large tea was served.

"Miss Shearer," opined one of the Sunkist executives, "is one movie star we are proud to have our wives meet." Apparently, Norma was not the First Lady of the Screen for nothing.

Ann Harding, Ruth Chatterton, and dear Marie Dressler were all on that first series. So was Marlene Dietrich.

Marlene was accompanied to all conferences by Josef von Sternberg. Joe read the script before la Dietrich did—for he had no intention that his lovely foreign star should make a mistake. He went over every word and blue-penciled with a lavish hand.

Sunkist was a steppingstone to other programs. The Charis Company in Philadelphia (and never was there a nicer organization) signed me to do a series of broadcasts similar to the Sunkist fifteen-minute interviews—and once again the music was to be provided by my old "friend," who was really a friend by now—you guessed it—Raymond Paige.

I had an idea for the Charis people—"previewing" the new movies over the air. Later, the preview idea was to attain wide popularity on my Hollywood Hotel program—but the Charis people did not like it. At least they were not enthusiastic. So we stuck to the ether interviews.

The Charis Company manufactured corsets—but this word was considered indelicate, so a lovely phrase, "Avoid abdominal bulge," was coined as a gentle hint to careless feminine listeners. Most of the glamorous beauties who appeared for me were so slender that the words were almost a sacrilege uttered in their presence. Everybody on the show had a terrible time restraining audible snickers when our announcer would take to the air with dignity and warn and warn and warn about that "abdominal bulging."

The entire "bulging" gang pitched in and wrote the scripts. Edgar Allan Woolf and Jock Lawrence, two writer friends of mine, came to our home every Sunday and we worked, climaxing the session with large and convivial Sunday luncheons. My husband, who was extremely bored with the whole thing, decided that what we needed was a little gaiety, and so he planned those luncheons, scouring the town for favors and delicacies. One Sunday we would have Mexican food, another Norwegian, another Chinese, another Jewish, another Armenian—until the lunches became more celebrated, I fear, than the broadcasts. Outsiders began to ask to be allowed to sit in on future "conferences," in which they had no professional part.

The very first preview of a movie ever put on the air was sponsored by this same Charis Corset Company. Norma Shearer and Herbert Marshall did *Riptide* for me, and it was a sensation. It did so much to publicize the picture that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer asked permission to repeat the show, which Charis very willingly gave them.

But still Charis did not like the "preview" idea and did not want me to continue, even though the Norma Shearer show, up to that moment, was the best program they had had on the air. How could it have been otherwise with Irving Thalberg giving me the best writers on the MGM lot and he, himself, putting the finishing touches to our little show.

The weeks and the programs rolled by. Joan Bennett surprised her fans by singing Brahms's "Lullaby" on my show and talking about her new baby and the way she decorated her nursery. May Robson, Kay Francis, Marion Davies, Carole Lombard, Sally Eilers—all these important "names" appeared on the Charis program for me—but at the end of the thirteen-week contract we were off the air. The Charis people had spent their radio advertising budget—and that was that.

It was a source of gratification later when Charis came to me and offered me an additional \$200 a week to go back on the ether for them. But by that time I had already signed with the Campbell Soup Company, at a much larger salary, to put on the Hollywood Hotel program. It had happened this way:

William Paley, head of the Columbia Broadcasting System, asked me if I would be interested in doing a show for Campbell's Soup. The idea was "Hollywood Hotel," the program to emanate from filmdom, and at the time neither he nor I had any idea that this show would for four years be one of the leading programs on the air. Later it sometimes seemed as if it would go on indefinitely. But when it started I wouldn't have given a nickel for its chances.

I have always been terribly self-conscious about my voice. I do not know whether the fact that I had tuberculosis has anything to do with it, but when I get scared, my voice gets high and thin—and scared I often was in those days—until I determined not to let a funny speaking voice get the better of me and lick me. I worked hard to overcome the handicap of not being able to talk without self-consciousness.

The set-up on Hollywood Hotel was a good one. Dick Powell, our master of ceremonies and star soloist, was very popular. Raymond Paige was . . . well—Raymond Paige—and none better, I say. Frances Langford was at her height as a blues singer. Lovely Ann Jamison and Igor Gorin supplied the classic moments enchantingly. Yet, all was far from sweetness and light. Like any family working or living too closely together, we had battles. Ah, what battles! There were moments when it seemed impossible that so much temperament could exist in a one-hour program. Our early shows were bad, and we knew it. Which didn't help our dispositions.

Then one day wild Bill Bacher came into our lives. Bacher,

with a shock of red hair and the most enormous belief in his own ability of any human being I have ever known, arrived to direct our shows. One minute you could love Bill devotedly. The next minute you were ready to kill him—but however he affected the personal feelings of its members, Bill Bacher saved Hollywood Hotel from a fate worse than death.

The important thing about Bill, our guiding explosive, was that he was never satisfied, no matter how good was our show. He modestly thought we ought to have Garbo, Gable, the President of the United States, and the King of England—all in one fell swoop. As far as Bacher was concerned, there was only one show on the air and that was Hollywood Hotel. He gave me confidence.

"What the hell," he would rant, "you're the First Lady of Hollywood, aren't you?"

"Am I?" I would tease him.

"You are in our script," he would bellow, "and that is all that matters."

"Then why do you yell at me?" I would prod on.

"Because you won't believe you are any good. Don't you know that any radio artist coached by Bacher is sensational?" he would shriek, running his nervous hands through hair already standing in an unruly upright arrangement.

After the visitation of Bacher we went along swimmingly. Fans all over the country believed that we were actually broadcasting from famous old Hollywood Hotel.

The real Hollywood Hotel is a landmark in Hollywood. It was in the early days the home of many famous stars. But bygone for many moons is its glamour. It has no Orchid Room (a delectable spot colorfully built up on the program), and visitors to Hollywood have been bitterly disappointed when they saw the real Hollywood Hotel after the glowing mental pictures we had built up on the air.

There are not many stars in Hollywood who did not appear as my guests on this program. It was characteristic of Bill Bacher and his eagerness to get all top names on our shows that in *China Seas* we had Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, and Rosalind Russell—all on one program. Only the President and the King were missing to keep Bill's happiness from being complete.

In spite of many things written to the contrary, the players who appeared as my guests did so willingly, for they felt the radio exploited their pictures and reflected at the box office.

Now and then we came a cropper with stars—but not often. One well-known actor imbibed a little too freely, and it was evident over the mike. Another actress refused to rehearse—even for the great Bacher. But only one star ever failed to keep a promise to appear, and that was Gladys George. She said she had a toothache.

Players who were supposed to be hellions around the movie studios turned out to be lambs for us. Jean Arthur, billed in advance as "very difficult," was delightfully co-operative on our broadcast.

Miriam Hopkins is a perfectionist in everything—a fault, or virtue, that has put her on the black list of several harrassed movie producers and directors. When Miriam was to be my guest we always expected—and were never disappointed—that she would rewrite the script. But as far as I am concerned la Hopkins, with her sophistication mingling oddly with her Southern accent, can do no wrong. She is a wonderfully loyal friend.

I remember well one occasion when Miriam was rehearsing with us. Unknown to anyone, she was getting ready to elope with Anatole Litvak, and as we left the studio that day she confided her plans to me. She said she wanted me to have the "beat." Then, immediately after the broadcast, when she and

Tola were preparing to elope, she discovered that a rival paper had the story.

I was upset. "Don't worry, Louella," Miriam said. "I promised you the story, and you shall have it. The rival sheet says we are eloping tomorrow. Well, we just won't do it." So she changed her plans and postponed her marriage in order to keep her word and give me an exclusive. Greater love hath no woman for a reporter!

Only one star ever refused point-blank to go on the air with me—and that was Ginger Rogers. Discussing the matter with me later, at a tea given by Alfred Vanderbilt, who was then interested romantically in Ginger, she said she felt that her pictures did not need exploitation—either via newspapers or radio. At least, it meant nothing to her whether they were advertised. All she was interested in, she explained, was the dough-re-mi on the dotted line, and apparently she meant what she said.

So I was surprised when Ginger was offered money to go on later—and still refused. She told a mutual friend that she might have accepted if "Parsons had been a poor struggling reporter." But for a moneybag like me—never! Ah, if Ginger could have known about Parsons and Money!

Hollywood Hotel might have gone on indefinitely if Bill Bacher had not seen fit to disagree with our sponsors. Dick Powell left too, and finally Campbell's Soup decided to put on the Campbell Showhouse instead of the good old Hotel. But this "follow-up," cut to thirty minutes instead of the full hour, never equaled Hollywood Hotel.

Later, I was on Hollywood Premières for thirty-nine weeks. The show can be summed up best by that fence-straddling description: Not good, not bad.

I like radio, and although it is nerve-racking and I can never take it casually the undying "ham" in me misses it.

I cannot say the same about my one brief fling as a movie star. Hollywood Hotel was responsible for my one and only picture, *Hollywood Hotel*, made by Warner's and based on our radio program. I could weep whenever I think of it.

Busby Berkeley was the director of the film, and I was most unfortunate (for my screen debut) in having him direct me while he was going through a lawsuit. He had had a bad automobile accident and was being tried for the death of several people killed in the crash. Under the circumstances he could hardly be expected to keep his mind on the job of guiding Parsons along the hard path of another Bette Davis. I never wanted to see that picture after the preview. I hadn't wanted to see it then.

In the dark theater that awful night I thought I heard a local critic laugh loudly when I appeared on the screen. I ran out of the theater and down the street. I have never been more unhappy in my life.

As an actress, I decided, I should be "read—and not seen."

Appearing on the stage, I later discovered, was much more "my meat." When I was first approached about going out on a personal appearance tour of movie theaters across the country with a hand-picked group of Hollywood youngsters, I thought it was the funniest offer I had ever had. I could neither sing nor dance nor even play the harmonica—and I couldn't see how it would interest audiences to watch me pecking away on my typewriter—my outstanding talent.

But the Leo Morrison Agency talked a good game—and late in November of 1939 we tried out "the act" in Santa Barbara preparatory to opening at the Golden State Theatre in San Francisco.

There was the nicest bunch of movie youngsters with me: Jane Wyman and Ronald Reagan, who were madly in love; Susan Hayward, beautiful redhead; Arleen Whelan, another

luscious redhead currently knocking them cold in New York in *The Doughgirls*; cute, blonde little June Preisser, who danced like a whizz; Joy Hodges, who sang torchily; and Mecca Graham, a popular Hollywood actor and a close friend of Doctor's and mine. This was my little troupe.

Nervous? I was as jittery as a Harry James addict from start to finish of that tour—and I was in the same state on our second tour with a troupe consisting of Binnie Barnes, Ilona Massey, Virginia O'Brien, Robert Stack, Robert Cummings, William Orr, Mike Frankovich, and Brenda Joyce.

Even after twelve weeks of barnstorming I couldn't shake the feeling that each time the curtain went up it was a minor rehearsal for the end of the world.

But I discovered one marvelous thing about audiences. If you don't try to put anything over on them they are for you. By not pretending to be Katharine Cornell and sometimes even confiding in an *ad lib.* that my knees were buckling I got by all right with the Paying Customer and found him extremely likable and appreciative.

The fear that I might forget my "lines" was so constantly with me that I resorted to all sorts of tricks, such as putting books with my "cues" written on the covers at strategic spots all over the stage.

Both tours were successes. But the real thrill of my life was the Louella Parsons Day in my home town, Dixon, Illinois. That was no make-believe spotlighted honor played before strangers. Here was the big moment of a lifetime to the girl who used to be known as Louella Oettinger, at the invitation of people I had known and loved all my life—the home folks.

There is not a youngster in the world who has ever lived in a small town, or in a big one either, who has not thought to himself: "Someday I will come back here SOMEBODY IMPORTANT! And bands will be playing and it will be a public

school holiday just for ME. And then, Miss Murdock, you will be sorry you made me stand in the corner in front of the whole class!"

I had thought such "bitter" thoughts many times during my girlhood in Dixon, when it seemed to me that not only my family but all the townspeople were amused and laughing because I wanted to be a writer.

It was with the feeling of a dream come true that I read an invitation from Mrs. Mabel Shaw, owner and publisher of the Dixon *Daily Telegraph*, and a lifelong friend, asking me to come to Dixon to christen the Louella Parsons Ward in the new wing of the Dixon Hospital.

From the moment I received the wire I lived, slept, and breathed the idea of that Louella Parsons Day—only deep inside me it seemed to be the Louella Oettinger Day. (Little Louella Oettinger—you remember her? She used to *think* she was going to be a writer!)

I thought it would be a nice idea if Ronald Reagan could go back with me, since Dixon is his home town too. Ronnie was doing very well in his career as a Warner Brothers actor, and I knew the home folks were proud of him and would want to see him.

What later developed into an expedition started as simply as that. I love to give parties, and I love extending invitations, and by the time I entrained for Dixon Ronnie, Ann Rutherford, George Montgomery, Virginia Lindsay and Sam Israel, publicists, and my brother Edwin were with me. Bob Hope had wired from the East that he and Jerry Colonna would be on hand for My Day (apologies to Eleanor). Joe E. Brown came on from Ohio, where he was appearing in a revival of *Elmer the Great*. An extra added surprise and delight was that Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon arrived from England in time to come to Dixon for the celebrating.

And celebrating it was, enough to satisfy even my imaginative heart. Dixon declared a public holiday. The schools were closed, not only in my own home town, but in thirteen near-by communities, to give the folks a chance to attend the festivities.

As we pulled into the station and I heard the band playing and saw the people with banners and big bouquets of flowers, and saw the faces of the kids I went to school with in the crowd—faces that had grown older, some sadder, all wiser—I told Ronnie: "I am going to break down and cry!"

"What?" he laughed. "And spoil that swell make-up you have been all morning putting on?" So, once again the ham in me overcame the sentimental. Or I thought it had.

They shoved enough American Beauties into my arms to last me the rest of my life, and I could hear old friends calling, "Hello, Louella." Then someone pushed me before a microphone on a specially built platform. I tried to say something. I wanted to say the most brilliant things I had ever said in my life. But I could feel the tears sneaking up on me again, and all I could manage was what was overflowing from my heart, "Thanks, thanks, thanks—"

Suddenly from behind me there was a yell as the one and only Bob Hope, the greatest master of ceremonies of all time, sprang out of nowhere, put his arm around me, and grabbed the microphone.

Pointing to a dilapidated hovel on the other side of the tracks, Bob said: "Ladies and gentlemen—over there is the birthplace of your townswoman, Louella Parsons. Do you wonder that this glamour girl, ablaze with orchids, dressed to the teeth, bedecked and bejeweled, wants to forget it? Do you wonder the little lady is overcome with emotion?"

There's nobody like Hope! He was in marvelous fettle, and the crowds loved him. As the parade started through the streets I saw out of the corner of my eye that Bob and Jerry

Colonna had borrowed bikes from the schoolboys and were running alongside my car yelling, "Yoo-hoo, Louella—remember *us*?"

It seemed to me that I remembered every face in that crowd. One of the boys with whom I had gone to school, Oliver Rogers, ran out to the car and kissed me. A photographer snapped our picture. When it later appeared in the newspapers Ollie's wife, a cousin by marriage, much younger than I and very pretty, said, "Why on earth did you let Ollie kiss you? Now he's telling everybody that you and he were once engaged!" Just for the records Ollie never gave me the time of day when we were kids in school.

Our entire Hollywood party were the guests of Mrs. Walgreen at her beautiful home at Hazelwood. She is the widow of the drugstore magnate, Charles Walgreen, and one of Dixon's most beloved women.

Looking back on it now, the whole thing seems to spin in my memory like a happy but dizzy dream. I was officially welcomed at the banquet by my former schoolmate, Mayor William Slothower. Later there was the christening of the hospital wing, the climax of the festivities.

Members of my old school club, the Kendall Club, came to call, and as many members of my graduating class as still lived in Dixon arrived en masse. The only promise I extracted from them was that they wouldn't tell the year we were graduated!

At the banquet I watched through misty eyes the dramatization my home people staged of my life story. The girl who played "Louella Parsons" was slender, dark, and oh, so pretty. I whispered to Joe E. Brown, who was the toastmaster, "I only wish I had been as pretty as that girl."

Sitting near me, holding my hand when the going got too sentimental, was my beloved little aunt, Carrie Roe. Bless her,

she was wearing her best dress and had driven over from Freeport for the festivities. "It would have made your mother the happiest woman in the world if she could have lived to see this day," Aunt Carrie whispered to me. For that dear face, the adored face of my mother who had died many years before, was all that was missing from my overflowing cup of happiness.

Both Joe E. Brown and Ronald Reagan introduced Aunt Carrie to the crowd. She looked so little and so dainty as the spotlight searched her out, and she rose to pay me one of the nicest compliments of my life. "Louella," she said, "was always a smart girl!" Then she sat down. Coming from Aunt Carrie, that was praise, indeed. She was never one to hand out bouquets.

If ever I reach the stage where old rockin' chair's got me the memory of the Louella Parsons Day in Dixon is one I will want to live over and over again. I'll say to myself, as I did when I was in Dixon, "This can't be me, Louella Parsons, these folks are honoring. As for you, Louella Oettinger, what did you ever do to deserve it?"

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS IN THE MIDDLE of Hollywood Hotel's third year on the air that it came to me I just wasn't the gal I used to be when I thought that working all day, all night, was fun!

I was badly in need of a rest after years of an uninterrupted grind. So Harry and I decided to go to Europe. We had been there together in 1932, five years before, and had longed to repeat the experience ever since.

We could not afford such an expensive jaunt, as usual—and, as usual, that did not stop us. Both of our incomes had tripled, it is true, since our marriage—Harry's in his successful practice and mine via the column and radio routes. But our obligations had kept pace relentlessly.

We had bought a farm! That is, Harry had bought it. He just walked in one day, that favorite Irishman of mine, and said: "Honey, I bought a farm today."

"You did *what*?" I gasped, thinking for a minute he might mean a Racing *Form*.

"I bought a farm," he repeated. "The other night at dinner Clarence Brown told me of a wonderful buy out in San Fernando Valley. It's a honey," he said, not exactly looking me in the eye. "Twenty-four of the finest little acres you ever saw."

Thus, as simply as that, did we become landed gentry and ranchers de luxe, once again completely equipped with building costs, potential labor troubles, and a really lovely place that was to blossom later (via every dime we had) as Marsons Farm.

At first I wanted no part of it. "Oh, take a look at it anyway," Harry insisted—and never shall I forget that first look. Not a bush, not a twig, not a scraggling radish on the place! One of the neighbors had planted some sad-looking tomato vines along the outskirts of the property, and a few brown-eyed Susans lent what rural cheer they could. It was pretty desolate, and I could have wept.

"The house will be *here*," explained my enthusiastic spouse, indicating a bleak clearing.

"I don't want a house out here," I almost wept. So, two weeks later he started building!

I refused to look at the house in construction and became increasingly peevish, more peevish than I have ever been with my Doctor before or since.

"What you need is a vacation," he finally diagnosed. "You are tired. Don't tell me a little thing like a farm is getting you down."

Out of the blue we decided to go to Europe, after first obtaining permission from Mr. Hearst for a leave of absence from the column, and by permission from the Campbell Soup people from the radio. The expense of a European vacation was a minor detail which apparently didn't occur to either of us.

Harriet agreed to pinch-hit for me, and never have I been more proud of my daughter. It would not have surprised me in the least if she had done me out of both jobs, she was that good.

I have no intention of excusing my enthusiasm over my daughter on the grounds of a mother's natural pride. She is a brilliant girl, and while she has definitely made her mark in life as a writer, a producer of Columbia Studio's famed Screen Snapshot "shorts," and later as the first woman feature producer since Lois Weber, at the Republic Studios, I still think she would have soared to even brighter heights if she had not happened to be my daughter. I have made enemies in my time, and some of them have reflected on the careers of both my husband and my daughter.

Nothing makes me more furious than this fact. At heart I have never really cared what brickbats came my way. I have encouraged some of them. I can take most of them. But for Harriet or my husband to suffer through any vendetta of mine makes me see four shades of red.

I never cease to marvel at my daughter's business sagacity. Where she acquired her gift for making every dollar count, of investing wisely and well, I shall never know. Today she not only owns her home in Westwood, a charming place, but she is the owner of a large, imposing, and *paying* apartment house on Olympic Boulevard.

Harriet is as independent as the Fourth of July. From the time she finished college and came out to join me in Hollywood she has persisted in "paddling her own canoe." She has always insisted that my financial obligation to her stopped with her college education. "From now on," she said, "it is up to me." It was more than the high-hearted talk of a young college girl. In spite of being my daughter she has forged her own success path in line with her own dictum: "Mother, don't ever ask for anything for me. If I can't get it on my own—I don't want it."

2

With the column and the radio show safely in Harriet's hands for the duration of my vacation, Doctor and I sailed for Europe on the *Rex*. Mr. and Mrs. Louis B. Mayer (boss of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), Howard Strickling, his publicity chief, Joseph Schenck, and Ben Thau, another Hollywood executive, were on the boat. I was in such wonderful spirits and having such a time for myself that I even forgot—the farm.

That summer was ideal. We motored leisurely through Italy like the wide-eyed tourists we were, visiting the little postcard towns, making pilgrimages to Padua, to the birthplace of St. Anthony, and saying our prayers in the church in Assisi where St. Francis worshiped. We went to the art galleries in Florence, and later to Rome, where we were joined by two other Hollywood pals, Sally Eilers and her husband, Harry Joe Brown.

With them we went to Salzburg and visited at Leopoldschön as the guests of the Max Reinhardts. It was the season of the Festival, of magnificent music and the thrillingly produced Reinhardt plays.

Everywhere there was such gaiety, such light-heartedness, that, looking back, it seems impossible to believe that the madman Hitler was even then working to destroy this dream

in his giant nightmare that was to ravage all Europe. Perhaps it is a dream that is gone forever. When the dreadful fighting is over men's hands may rebuild what one man's greed has destroyed—but it is not so easy to put the song back on men's lips and the dreams back in their hearts.

If Europe was sick and dying of political plague in those days the poison had not yet seeped into Salzburg. I am glad I saw Europe in the twilight of her glory. It won't be there again in my time.

The Reinhardts were divine hosts, the kind you hope for and so seldom encounter. They left us to browse through the lazy days as we pleased—just being tourists to our hearts' content. At night Leopoldschön looked like a world's embassy. We seldom dined before the stroke of midnight, and it would take the rest of this book to list and identify the celebrities and world-renowned personalities who gathered in the magnificent dining hall.

"This place reminds me of our farm, dear! It's so different!" Harry would tease me. "It will be just the ideal little spot to entertain our guests!"

But I was in no mood to joke about our weed-infested farm, especially in comparison to the story-book castle, Leopoldschön. It is terrible now to think of this beautiful place being in the hands of the mistress of a Nazi officer—this palace which had once belonged to a Catholic bishop whose heart is buried in its chapel.

Salzburg is so near the dividing line of Austria and Italy that the castle had more of an Italian feeling than many in Italy itself. While we were there Toscanini, the greatest of the great musical conductors, was a dinner guest, along with his two beautiful daughters.

Mrs. Reinhardt, who is Helene Thimig, and one of Europe's finest actresses, was equally celebrated as a hostess. Her

clothes fascinated me, for she affected the costumes of her country. It is ironical that all of her lovely things were left behind, even things she could have brought to America, because she and Professor Reinhardt thought they were paying only a short visit to California. Then—before they could return to beautiful Leopoldschön—the Nazis walked in.

"But what are gowns and treasures?" she later said to me in Hollywood. "We would be in a concentration camp back there." Since the war the Reinhardts have been living in Hollywood, where the master for a time conducted a school of acting, and not very successfully, I regret to say. Doctor and I have seen them several times, but I think seeing us makes them a little sad, for try as we will we can talk only of those happy, gay, colorful days of Salzburg.

"To think," Reinhardt says sadly, his fine head moving from side to side, "that Leopoldschön was a gift to me because the people loved me and appreciated what I had done to make Salzburg an art center, and today it is filled with Nazi officers and soldiers and has been a secret meeting place for Hitler and Mussolini!"

From Salzburg Doctor and I went to Budapest, where we met Molnar and had the pleasure of attending a dress rehearsal of one of his plays. We were lucky enough to have Alexander Ince as our host—and what a character he is! Officially editor of one of the popular magazines, he is really "Mr. Budapest."

Ince not only took us to all the theaters but translated the plays for us, and to this day I wonder if the original dialogue was half as risqué as the version he relayed to us.

The difficult part about keeping up with Ince was that he did not believe in going to bed. "What?" he would protest. "Go to bed while there is still this lovely, haunting gypsy music to listen to? You can sleep in America." Night after

night we went to the cafés and listened until the last strains of the throbbing violins died away around dawn. Ince showed us the dance hall where Marlene Dietrich had made her debut, long before Josef von Sternberg discovered her. He took us to quaint little restaurants not known to the average tourist, and I have never eaten such food or so much food. I adore Budapest, but it gets around my waistline!

The day we left Ince said he was going out of town, returning the next day to attend a soccer game. "If you will ride with me to the country," he said, "I will see that my car delivers you at the station."

As we stepped into his car I noticed two bags—exactly alike. I said, "You are a vain man taking two suitcases full of clothes to the country for a twenty-four-hour visit."

"Madame Martin," he said, "I have a rendezvous with two ladies—one a lovely blonde, the other an equally lovely brunette. You would find the same clothes in each case—a toothbrush, a dressing gown, and a *robe-de-nuit*."

"Which lady do you love best?" I laughingly asked.

"Neither," he answered sadly. "My true love is in Berlin at the moment!"

3

London, of course, was the last stop on our itinerary. If we had gone there first—we knew so many people there from Hollywood—we wouldn't have gone any farther.

It seemed like a breath of home, being with Bebe and Ben, who are adored there and who are the Britishers' favorite Americans. I made a really extensive tour of the studios and spent an entire day at Pinehurst—certainly one of the most interesting film "lots" in the world. It had formerly been the ancestral castle of a titled Englishman and had been converted

into a busy movie studio, or at least as busy as a studio becomes in dear old England. Compared to the way stars work in Hollywood it seemed to me more like a tea party that was rudely interrupted every now and then when one of the guest "actors" had to step before the cameras a moment to emote. I am used to a great deal of bustle and commotion during working hours, and I do not know whether I would relish the leisurely methods of the British. But they like it, and make excellent pictures, I think. The best, next to Hollywood!

It had been a glorious trip, but one of the important things about vacations is that the best of them must come to an end, so we sailed for home late in October. The idea of home seemed to remind Harry of the farm. All the way back, on boat and train, he talked of little else.

I still wanted no part of it! "I wish you would at least take a look at the house going up," he argued when we were safely returned, tired but happy. "We have always done everything together. I am building this house for you. I want you to like it."

He had started building a small home where, he said, I could get away and rest. (I have never had a moment's rest at Marsons Farm—but that is beside the point. It was a nice idea.)

I finally agreed to take one look at his house, and, of course, that was my undoing. Just show me the woman who can keep her pet ideas out of a house in construction!

"No house of mine is going to have a garage built under it," I started complaining, "and I won't tolerate such a little fireplace!" I was lost. I knew it—and so did Harry.

It was hard work, let me tell you. Making a garden spot of twenty-four acres of uncultivated property was no cinch, even before war times. I am personally acquainted with every blade of grass on the place and with every slab of lumber

that went into the main house, the farmer's house, the barns, and the playroom. I never go by the cornfield that I don't wave at an old, familiar stalk of my acquaintance—and the orange groves and I are on hand-picking terms. But that didn't happen all in a day.

Little by little the place began to take form. The big white colonial house was finally erected and furnished. The swimming pool was in. There were horses in the stables and chickens in the coops when we decided to preview the place officially. But we were a little short of grass in vital spots!

I'll never forget borrowing some artificial grass from one of the studio "prop" departments and getting down on my hands and knees and matching it with our own lawn! With chairs and tables and gaily colored umbrellas everywhere, so help me, you couldn't tell where nature's grass left off and the studio's make-believe began!

Sometimes it seems to me that some of the saddest and some of the happiest days of my life have been spent at Marsons Farm. That is what a real home is for. That is what makes it a home.

I have shed heart-broken tears and prayed, as I have never prayed before, within the four walls of the pink-and-blue bedroom with the big fireplace that I have learned to love so much. During the terrible winter when I thought I was going to lose Harry from pneumonia, when he lay for days in an oxygen tent and struggled for life that seemed to hang on by a bare thread, that pink-and-blue bedroom was my haven, and my retreat. Father John O'Donnell, bless him, was by my side, and if it hadn't been for his prayers and his help I couldn't have lived through those dark days.

During the days before my daughter's marriage that same room was the center of all the gay, happy plans we made for her garden wedding. Harriet married King Kennedy in the

rose garden at Marsons Farm in September 1939. If I had chosen my son-in-law myself I couldn't have found one more to my liking than this young actor-writer who married my only child.

He is a charming boy, witty and clever, with a disposition right out of heaven. "It's nice that somebody in the family has one," said Harriet—and don't think she was kidding!

CHAPTER XIV

WE NEVER KEPT a guest book at Marsons Farm, but we have something better—a guest "orchard." The first tree given us bears the inscription "Carole and Clark," and its beautiful olive branches lift silvery leaves toward the sky, a living memento of the girl who left us too soon.

Carole Lombard and Clark Gable were two of the first and the most interested visitors at Marsons Farm. Later they were to buy a farm of their own in Encino, and they said it was our interest in our place, and having to listen to Harry and me talk about it for hours at a time, that got them steamed up about rural life.

Carole looked less like a "farmer's wife" than any girl imaginable. With her flair for wearing clothes, her blonde hair, and her beautiful jewelry she was the epitome of sophistication. Before she met and married Clark she lived in a house on Hollywood Boulevard as luxurious as a jewel box. William Haines had decorated it, and the motif was Greek—I guess. At least magnificent Grecian heads and urns decorated the living room, which was "done" in soft blue-gray and cerise, and the divans "that had no backs," as Clark described them.

"It's the best room in the world to break a bust, an ash tray, or your neck," he used to rib Carole.

This love story of Gable, the he-man of the movies, and Carole, the silken girl, is too well known to need detailed recounting. Much has been written about the way Clark changed Carole's life from that of a butterfly to that of a girl who went on hunting and fishing trips, who "packed in" on jaunts to the mountains of Oregon and into the hills of Mexico, along with the best of them. But less has been said about the marked changes Carole made in Clark's personality.

She brought him real happiness, and youth, and laughter, for the first time in his life. Life hadn't been easy for Clark, the former oil driller, stage actor, and movie "bit" player. He came up the hard way. He was married twice previously—to Josephine Dillon and Ria Gable, both charming women, both cultured, but both much older than he. Both helped him in the struggle to the top. Both were vital influences in his life and his work. But Clark never knew the joy and the pleasure and the gaiety of life until he met Carole.

The four of us would barbecue steaks at the farm, light the fire, and sit around by the hour talking. Clark and Harry talked horses, cows, chickens, smudge pots, orchards, and farming. Carole and I talked Early American furniture and how I should have that old rosewood chair of my grandmother's reupholstered. She designed a playroom table for me that later was one of the highlights of interest when our farm was pictured and written up for *House Beautiful*. The table has the usual wood top and looks for all the world, at first glance, like an old-fashioned, circular, farm dining room table for the whole family. But lift off the top—and presto, it's a poker table with built-in chip compartments.

Carole was a talented decorator, and if she had not been an actress she would have made her mark in that field. When

Doctor and I were in Europe, Clark, Carole, Fieldsie, and Walter Lang completely redid my bathroom in the Maple Drive house. They tore out the old walls, put in mirrored sides, tub and stand and blinds, and presented me with a complete new color scheme of bath and hand towels in peach and blue. That bathroom is luxury plus.

"It was all Carole's idea," Clark explained. I knew he was telling the truth, because she personally decorated it.

2

Another olive tree at Marsons Farm came from Myrna Loy and Arthur Hornblow—a beautiful thing that has flourished better than their marriage, I am sorry to say. The final parting and divorce of Myrna and Arthur was a surprise—and I am not often surprised by Hollywood divorces.

They had been ideally happy together for years. The adoring Hornblow called his piquant, redheaded wife "Minnie," and he was the only person she permitted to do so. I know how she feels about that. Harry is the only person I can bear to hear call me "Lolly."

In the beginning of their happiness I believe Myrna and Arthur were so much in love they did not realize how divergent were their tastes. Myrna has simple ideas. Arthur is a sybarite. She could have been happy in a three-room bungalow, and when their marriage finally crashed she moved into one immediately—from the elaborate home he built for her in Coldwater Canyon. Arthur believes in the formality of good living—or good living as it was known before the war.

Soon after their parting a group of typical Hollywood insiders were discussing the rift. "I wonder why in the world Myrna and Arthur ever parted?" someone asked.

"I think she just got tired watching him test the burgundy

for room temperature," cracked a wiseacre. I wouldn't be knowing.

When we first went to the farm it was the idea not to have a telephone on the place. But, I ask you, where can I go and not need a pipeline to receive news of the elopements, births, and sudden divorces that are grist for the columnist's mill? So, eventually, the Marsons Farm 'phone became nearly as active and overworked as our three busy, buzzing lines in Hollywood.

Rosalind Russell's much-rumored elopement with Freddie Brisson, Annabella's marriage to Tyrone Power, Alice Faye's date with the stork, Bette Davis' plans to marry Arthur Farnsworth, all came over the wire to me at Marsons Farm.

The Russell story was the funniest. We had settled down for a quiet afternoon by the pool, not even thinking of printer's ink, when the City Editor of the Los Angeles *Examiner* telephoned.

"Louella," he explained, "a cop who just arrested Rosalind Russell and Freddie Brisson for speeding called here and said he wanted to give you a scoop. He says they told him they were going to be married—and he let them go so he could hurry to a telephone and let you know the news!"

Now there is what I call a pal, and I will always have a warm spot in my heart for him, even though it was a false alarm.

I didn't know that then, but I did warn the paper not to print their "marriage plans" without verification. All Sunday long, and far into the night, I tried to reach Roz without success.

The next Sunday the paper telephoned again that they had a sure tip that Roz and Freddie were eloping. Once more my day of rest, quote and unquote, was wrecked as I tried to trace la Russell.

When I finally got her she said, "Look here, Louella, I'm not going to elope. When I marry Freddie it will be in a church—and I'll let you know."

"Could you make it any other day *except* Sunday?" I pleaded. "I'd like to look at the pool instead of into the mouth-piece of this telephone just one Sunday in my life."

"It's a deal," she laughed. And it was.

3

We have had big parties at the farm, some as formal as Harriet's wedding and reception with 400 guests. But we have the most fun when just a handful of us go out for the weekend and do our own cooking—and stewing.

I'm quite an Irish stew maker myself, if I do say so. It is common talk that when I cook I do not need to advertise the fact. Every pot and pan in the place is in use on the stove, and sometimes on the floor, and I manage to get myself pretty well dusted with flour from the tip of my nose to the back of my apron. There have been complaints about me and my mode of cooking but seldom about my stews—except from the boys who do the dishes afterward.

But I will admit that I am hardly at my most social when I'm "at the stove," which is just exactly where I was the day Greer Garson paid her first visit to me.

It was unexpected because Greer and I had been trying to get together on an interview date and had not been able to settle on a mutually agreeable time and place. Finding herself with a free Sunday afternoon on her hands, she decided to drive out with her mother to visit me at the farm.

I didn't know Greer very well then, only by reputation. I had thought she was charming in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, but I also thought she was very much the "lady," so when I looked

out the kitchen window and saw a cucumber-cool Miss Garson, looking exactly like she had stepped out of a bandbox, approaching the back door (of all places), I felt exactly like the bride who is caught doing the family wash when the minister's wife comes to call!

My face was redder than a beet, from heat and embarrassment, as I opened the back door and admitted the company. If a sudden flicker of surprise crossed her face at the spectacle I made in the kitchen, completely surrounded by pots, pans, Irish potatoes, and onions, she disguised it quickly.

"Oh, perhaps we should not have come today," she said in her rippling English accent. "You are so busy."

I thought, "Lady Garson, you couldn't have chosen a worse time"—but what I said was, "I'm delighted to have you and your mother. You *must* stay to dinner!" You know what I mean. I bet you have said the same thing yourself—and in the next moment begun to wonder if that stew was going to be just half enough to feed everybody!

I was already tired. I had planned to have the boys (Doctor's cronies) come in and help themselves—farm style. But now I had to set a table and make a salad and stir around for something—for the love of heaven—for dessert! You don't just open your mouth to a charming, visiting English lady and her parent and yell out, "Soup's on!"

My feet were, to borrow a phrase from Harry, "barking like a couple of Airedales" as I trudged back and forth between the kitchen and the dining room with that meal. The table was far from its most attractive. I merely piled the food in the middle and, gasping for air and relief, called the gang in to lunch.

If the Garsons were dismayed at the sight of Doctor and the other men in swimming trunks they gave no sign of it. Greer completely captivated everyone with her wit and her

Irish brand of beauty, and when she started carrying off dishes afterward and helping me right that wrecked kitchen, I began to warm to her myself.

But she didn't completely get me until we had settled in two big swings down by the pool, letting the cool breeze blow over my weary face and fan Greer's beautiful hair.

"You make the most wonderful stew," she said, with real appreciation. "I never ate a better meal." To my mind her speech when she won the Academy Award for *Mrs. Miniver* last year was just a toss-off compared to that beautiful tribute to my culinary talents!

Our friendship started from that day. I like Greer and admire her. When she fell in love with young Richard Ney, the boy who played her son in *Mrs. Miniver*, she invited me to dinner and explained the problems of that romance to me.

Ney had joined the Navy and was being called immediately to active duty. Greer was in love with him, but she did not know whether they should marry or wait until the end of the war. It would be violating her confidence to tell all that we talked about that night. But she was so honest and so frank that she did not seem like the successful actress who was picking off most of the plum roles at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and who was the leading candidate in the Academy Award race.

She seemed like any woman, or, rather, like all women whose lives have been uprooted by the war and who hope and pray in their hearts that the decisions they make are the right ones.

Greer and Richard took out their wedding license before he sailed away, but they were not married until months later, when he was on leave from active duty. Greer had made her decision, and who is to say that she was wrong to decide to take her happiness with the boy she loves—and not to wait?

4

Paulette Goddard came out frequently, usually accompanied by one of the Chaplin boys. She and Charlie had just recently separated—that is, Paulette had moved out of the Chaplin mansion—but she and the boys remained friends. Certainly the two young Chaplins were wild-eyed admirers of their stepmother.

Paulette has always been an enigma to me. With her shoulder-length, dark, waving hair and her eager expression, she is as friendly as a pup. I know that is an unusual description for a glamorous “sweater girl” who has been able to make so many men fall in love with her.

But if Paulette has potent charm for the masculine sex she has also a fine flair, real or assumed, for getting along with women. She’s likable, easy to talk to, and certainly never the obvious siren. I have had reason to be extremely grateful to her. During the time when I was undergoing considerable criticism on the radio (certain local writers said I was dragging stars to the microphone against their will) she appeared eagerly and willingly for me and told me that I could always count on her. Marlene Dietrich is another girl who came through for me—when her friendship meant the most. I’ll never forget either of them for that. But Paulette puzzles me.

She is the shrewdest manager of her own career of any star I have ever known. She never makes a move that will not help Paulette. But once in a while she gets her dates mixed. For example:

I was amused when she returned not so long ago from one of her frequent trips to Mexico and called me immediately: “Louella,” she enthused, “I’ve thought of you constantly. I’ve

brought you some trinkets, darling, and I want to bring them over to the house today."

I told her the gifts were not half as nice as her thinking about me and that I would love to see her.

But she never arrived! Several days later I read in *Hedda Hopper's* column: "Paulette Goddard dropped by the house with some lovely trinkets for me which she brought back from Mexico." I am still wondering whether Paulette thought she was talking to Hedda when she called me, or whether she thought she was at *my* house when she called on Hedda? I got a big laugh out of it.

5

Frances and Sam Goldwyn are old friends from the New York days who enjoy coming to the farm in spite of the fact that Sam and I battle there just as ardently as we do via the telephones in our offices. I sometimes think my bitterest fights in Hollywood have been with Sam.

It is completely useless to argue with my favorite Mr. Malaprop. You can't argue with a man who won't let you get in a word edgewise, or on the bias. Sam does all the talking. He asks a question and then answers it himself before you can get your mouth open. After about an hour of this he once snapped: "See? You haven't said a word in defense of yourself!"

But I like him, and I am not a girl to underestimate Monsieur Goldwyn. Let the wiseacres repeat his *faux pas* to their hearts' content. When the chips are down Sam is smart—plenty smart. I believe even his tantrums are staged with a weather eye out for the best possible results. I notice he usually picks his fights with me when he is just about to release a new picture. He knows we will eventually make up, and also,

knowing me, he realizes I will bend over backward giving him space to prove we are pals again!

But never let it be said that Sam isn't a real friend.

When I had tuberculosis he came to the hospital to see me. He sent Frances out of the room, and then he said: "How are you fixed for money? I can let you have \$5000—or any amount you need. You needn't worry about paying me back, but *if you live* you can pay me."

I said, "Sam, I can tell by the way you say it—'*if you live*'—you don't expect I will, you old scallywag. But I don't need the money."

"See?" wailed Sam. "There you go, picking a fight with me right on your deathbed!" I was kidding him, naturally. His heart was in the right place, and I'll always love him for it, even if I am tempted to strangle him with my naked hands on occasion.

Typical of my troubles with Sam was our fracas over an item in my column recently about Lillian Hellman. Sam regards the brilliant playwright as his own particular property—she wrote her first movie (*These Three*) for him—and when I printed that Joseph Schenck had signed her for several stories at 20th Century-Fox, Goldwyn hit the ceiling!

He raved. He ranted—and when Sam rants, he doesn't leave a word unturned. It just happened that I had been in Joseph Schenck's office and I had seen the contract Miss Hellman had signed with him. Sam demanded that I retract my story immediately.

Naturally, I would not agree to deny the story after seeing the contract.

"All right," sputtered Sam, "Hedda Hopper will deny it tomorrow. I'll call Joe Schenck and he will deny it. I'll call——"

"I don't care if you call Houdini," I snapped, "my story

stands. If Lillian Hellman denies that contract she's suffering from amnesia!"

"You'll hear from me later," raved Sam, threatening dire things. So what happens? Exactly nothing!

6

The latchstring is always out and the door wide open to one particular visitor to Marsons Farm—Father Thomas English, pastor of the little frame Our Lady of the Valley Church. I wish there were more spiritual leaders in the world like this man—a young man, but so deeply sympathetic and understanding that he seems to embody the wisdom of the ages.

He is the tallest priest in America—almost the tallest man I have ever seen. He is six feet seven in height, and he laughingly says he was just the "baby" in his family of five brothers taller than he! He is Irish—and like all Irishmen, proud of it.

I believe in my heart he would rather be the spiritual shepherd of that tiny little country church than of the finest cathedral in the country. "I have come to know the people, Louella," he says. "They are my friends, just as I am their friend. Friendship is a real and tangible thing. It has roots as deep as the beautiful trees in this valley. And yet it can be as gossamer as the flitting expression over the faces as I look from the pulpit over the congregation. When a man has friends he has great wealth."

Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz and the Paul Kellys attend Father English's little church every Sunday. Before her death grand old Kate Price (remember her from the days of the silent flicker comedies?) used to journey over to early Mass from the near-by Motion Picture Country House.

Father English, Kate, and I stood on the steps of the church one Sunday, and the young priest and I could hardly hide

our smiles as the fat, kind-faced Irishwoman enthused to her heart's content about this wonderful home the movie people support to take care of their own.

"Sure and it's Paradise, Father," she exclaimed. "Everybody is so wonderful there, treating everybody so fine."

"That's what Paradise is, Kate," said the young priest. "Everybody treating everybody else—just fine."

CHAPTER XV

THERE ARE JUST TWO THINGS that people outside the profession invariably ask me: First, the "inside" on whatever Hollywood romance or divorce happens to be occupying current newspaper space. Second, the "real" age of a favorite movie actress.

I have always held that a lady's age is her own business. A woman is just as old as she looks to other people. Youth, in the long run, is a frame of mind, and the woman who keeps mentally alert is a young woman no matter which age-mark she has just passed.

But certainly lately there has been an epidemic of older women marrying much younger husbands in our unpredictable village. It has attracted so much attention that psychoanalysts are writing feature articles on the trend for the Sunday supplements.

Norma Shearer, who was very frank in saying that her husband, Marty Arrouge, is only twenty-nine while she is thirty-eight, was one of the first to fall head over heels in love with a younger man.

Ginger Rogers practically charmed the baby-faced Marine,

Jackie Briggs, right out of the arms of his puppy-love former girl friend, Bonita Granville, and married him after six dates.

Joan Crawford reluctantly admits that Phil Terry is her junior, "but by just a few years."

Ann Sothern, in her thirties, recently became the bride of Robert Sterling, in his twenties.

Rosalind Russell is older than Fred Brisson.

I am no professional psychoanalyst—but I do know my movie people and I think few of the experts, in analyzing the situation, have hit on the real reason for these marriages.

Remember this—actresses are professionally youthful women. Not all of them are young. But they must retain the charm and appeal of youth—and I'll say to their everlasting credit that they do, even after they have reached the years when many women become careless and let themselves grow fat and old.

Another important factor is that actresses, particularly the successful ones, are extraordinarily independent. Many of them manage their financial affairs as competently as any businessman. It is not easy for an independent woman to bow to anyone other than herself as the head of the house. Younger men are far more tractable than older husbands who have made their own mark in the world and who find it difficult to adjust their lives to the spotlight of their wives' fame.

Still another attraction is that young men are more "becoming" to actresses. The power to attract young men will always be the way women judge one another's sex appeal—and sex appeal to Hollywood is what honey is to the bee.

Unfortunately for the happiness of those concerned, sex appeal is a far more common commodity in Hollywood than love. Real love always comes with a high price-mark, sometimes higher than the glamour boys and girls are willing to pay.

There are two schools of thought about actors as individuals.

One is that they are "just like other folks—just like your next-door neighbors." Well, they are not! The other belief is that they are creatures "out of this world," breathing the rarefied air of deities. And they are not that either!

It is as impossible to generalize about actors as it would be to say that all defense workers are alike, or all insurance salesmen, or all baseball players.

There are players who are always in the "showcase." These are the giddy, gay, personality boys and girls whose lives and loves hit the front pages regularly. They are the Oomph and Zing performers, the "It" honeys. They have been with us since the first days of the movies, and they will remain as long as cute little soda jerkers continue to have photogenic faces. Of these are the Clara Bows and the Lana Turners.

But behind them are the solid citizens, the folks like the Don Ameches and the Robert Youngs, the Bing Crosbys and the Bob Hopes, and dozens and dozens more who live just as prosperous and firmly united family groups do all over this U.S.A.

There is still a third category—that of the "genius breed"—the artists of the Chaplin variety—and more recently, Orson Welles, the self-elected genius. Because Hollywood is international, as well as home-nourished, there is also the "British set" composed of the Herbert Marshalls, the Ronald Colmans, *et al.*, and the French group, made up the serious-minded Charles Boyer, Annabella, Simone Simon, Jean Gabin, and several important directors.

Among actors, as in other groups, there are the plodders and the butterflies—and as a reporter of their combined doings I have to admit that the butterflies make the best copy, even if they also make the most headaches and the most trouble for the whole industry.

It is the Oomph People who make the headlines. It is the

Oomph actresses who, all day long at the studios, dramatize themselves and play at make-believe emotions. Unfortunately, sometimes, for all of Hollywood, the habit of dramatization does not drop from them automatically the minute the whistle blows at the movie factory and they step back into their private lives. Actors and actresses are usually in the center of the stage, and they seldom forget it, even with one another. Which reminds me of the amusing story of two famous stars who were very much in love but who continually battled to their hearts' content.

One day they staged the battle supreme and decided that everything was over between them. The girl, a gorgeous blonde of the glamour variety, broke down and wept as though her life were ending when her hero finally stalked out of the house and out of her life forever.

"Damn him!" she wailed later, recounting the big moment to a girl friend. "Damn him for goading me into the big scene of my life—when my hair needed touching up! I looked like a wreck!"

There have been some fine love stories over the years I have been "covering" the Hollywood scene, but the torrid ones that hit the front pages have seemed, to me, to contain much of the fictional. The spotlighted husband and wife seldom forget that they are the Hero and the Heroine of their own fiction story.

Nothing ever penned by the sobbiest of sob sisters has ever been more fictional than the marriage, followed by the quick separation and the equally sudden reconciliation, of Lana Turner and Steve Crane.

Lana surprised the world when she married Crane, a young man who admits he descended on Hollywood with a capital of \$10,000 for the purpose of blowing it in and having a good time for himself.

But the surprise of their marriage was mild compared to the shock to everyone when Lana had her marital ties annulled shortly after she knew she was to become a mother. What was the status of the unborn child? Would it be illegitimate?

Law books were consulted to find out just what happens when a man marries a movie star (or any woman) before he is free of a previous marriage. That had been Lana's annulment plaint—Crane was not yet legally divorced from his former wife, Carol Kurtz, when he eloped with her.

The California laws were obliging. They said Lana was the injured party and that she had acted in good faith when she married Crane. The child would be legitimate.

At the time of the annulment Lana swore she was through with Crane forever and would never remarry him. So the boy who came out to Hollywood for "just a good time" *accidentally* drove his car off a cliff and wound up in the hospital.

He might have saved himself the trouble—because when he was fully recuperated, what did Lana do but make up with him and elope secretly to Mexico and marry him all over again! Her explanation was: "I love Steve. I always have. And I want him to go in the Army knowing his family will be waiting for him when he comes out." You see, just like in the movie plots, love conquers all!

Another extraordinary little Hollywood romantic custom that seems to puzzle the innocent bystanders is the sweet "hearts and flowers" announcement of engagements and romances between couples who are still married (one, or both of them) to other partners. Think nothing of it. The only thing colder than yesterday's news in Hollywood is yesterday's love.

George Raft and Betty Grable were officially "engaged" insofar as they themselves, the fans, and the columnists were

concerned, for three years, in spite of the fact that George had a wife in the background who was legally Mrs. Raft—and had been for over twenty years! Of course they were separated, but so far I have never read of this making any difference in the pages of *Emily Post*, who is pretty clear on the point that a gent should be unencumbered before the announcements are mailed out.

A particularly nice angle is that the wife usually understands the situation perfectly and sometimes admits that she will get a divorce when, and if, her “engaged” husband asks her to.

Recently Mrs. Harry James, wife of the jitterbug idol, granted an interview in which she said: “I read in the papers where Harry is planning to marry another girl. I’ll give him a divorce whenever he asks for one. But I am not going to Reno with two small children in tow to get it!” With the housing problem what it is—*that* was expecting too much.

Good-looking movie hero Richard Arlen has been separated from his actress wife, Jobyna Arlen, for over five years—but never divorced. In the eyes of the law they are still ONE. Yet there is no embarrassment in chronicling that Dick and pretty, young Virginia Grey are no longer “that way” and that he is now being seen with a brand-new lady.

I sometimes think that such actors are like children—grown-up children playing with the most dangerous and fascinating toys in the world—charm and money. They can be—and have been—their own worst enemies. But there is grand generosity in them—for show me the actor who can refuse an honest appeal to help any worthy cause.

Whenever there is an emergency the stars are right there—with more help than has been asked of them. Even the slightest accusation against Hollywood in connection with the war effort makes me fighting mad. There is not a studio that has not been depleted of the talent not only of stars and featured

players, but of those unsung heroes, the technicians. Bob Hope has raised \$25,000,000 for Uncle Sam's treasury on bond-selling jaunts.

Clark Gable walked out on one of the largest salaries ever paid an actor, at the height of his fame, to join the Air Corps.

Ty Power joined up to let the Marines tell it to him. Robert Taylor passed his Navy examinations with extremely high marks. Victor Mature, far famed as the beautiful "Hunk o' Man," joined the Coast Guard and has been on active duty since shortly after the outbreak of the war.

Thousands of lesser heroes are representing Hollywood's rank and file in various branches of the service all over the globe. And, as always in time of war, the women they left behind are carrying on as best they can—the toys and the make-believe miraculously forgotten in the common struggle we are all going through.

As long as Uncle Sam has a job to be done Hollywood will be standing by, ready to serve in any capacity expected and asked of it. For war isn't glamorous, and war isn't fiction. And the toys in the hands of actors today are even more dangerous and deadly than money and fame. They are guns and bullets—and they mean business.

CHAPTER XVI

I KNEW INSTINCTIVELY, as soon as we were at war with Germany, Italy, and Japan, that Harry would be in the thick of things before many days had passed. And the little pain that stabbed into my heart could not be stilled, even before he told me he had enlisted.

When I saw what was coming I found I was not one of those super women who can look at the man they love and talk and think about duty. I admire those women. I am not one of them.

My little attempts at talking around the subject must have been as pitiful to him as they were obvious. I would say, "We are not as young as we used to be, darling." I would talk about the happy fourteen years we had known together and of all the good he could do right here at home.

He would grunt behind his evening paper and quickly turn a page, and he would say: "What do you mean—'We aren't as young as we used to be?' First time I ever heard you admit that you were not a glamour girl!"

And I would try to laugh—but it would fall flat. I knew my man.

Harry had been a Captain in the Medical Corps in the first World War, and when he handed me a letter from the Surgeon General commissioning him as a Major, with orders to proceed to the Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco, May 15, 1942, I wasn't really surprised. I had known it would come all along. It had just been a question of "When?"

I didn't say anything to let him know what was in my heart after that. What is there a woman can say that will make one little bit of difference? I was really proud of him in his uniform, and proud that, at his age, he was one of the first Hollywood doctors to offer his services.

I was better off than most women, I told myself—much better off. I could take care of myself financially. Moreover, I had my work, nerve-racking sometimes, but a job that kept me so busy I seldom found enough hours in the day to cover everything I should do. I had my daughter and my friends in Hollywood. I had my religion, a never-failing solace, and more and more I found myself leaning on the strength my faith gave me.

I had seen many young husbands, young enough to be our sons, leave wives and babies—with their future so uncertain. I had heard their stories when I served at the Naval Aid Auxiliary Canteen down at San Pedro and at the Hollywood Canteen. I had posted letters for these boys and looked at the photographs they carried next to their hearts, and heard them whisper hopes that everything would be all right with their loved ones while they were gone—and so I would have been ashamed to have cried and broken down. I had had a full life, and these kids were just starting.

Over and over I reminded myself of these things. I kept telling myself I was lucky. But when I was alone I cried as heartbrokenly into my pillow as though I were a young bride without fourteen of the happiest years of my life behind me. I may have kept a stiff upper lip to Harry and to our friends, but I was no heroine to myself.

It is the common belief that as we grow older we grow more hardened and able to cope with upsets. But I believe that young people can "take" things better.

Every weekend I commuted up to San Francisco to be with my Doctor. He was doing such wonderful work, taking care of the wounded youngsters already back and under treatment at Letterman, that I hoped to God he would be satisfied with his duties there.

I didn't think I could bear it if he volunteered for overseas duty.

One Saturday night when I arrived he said: "Let's have dinner in our room at the hotel tonight—just by ourselves. I want to talk to you."

I knew what that meant. "You are going away!" I said, trying to keep my voice from trembling.

"In ten days," he said. "Word came this morning."

How many times in a woman's life does she take a breath

that stabs her to the heart before she has the strength to release it again in some banality—the “right thing” to say?

If I had spoken the way I felt I would have been ill. So, of course, we talked about shopping for overseas equipment, about the ranch, and whether the burden of the two places would be too much for me to keep up without him, and whether we should rent one or the other—and of all the things that were unimportant.

We both assumed that he was going to Australia, although, of course, he was told nothing officially. I came back to Hollywood after we had agreed that I wouldn't fly up to San Francisco again until the weekend of his departure. How I got through those next seven days I'll never know.

My hands found the typewriter, and I listened to what was said to me over the telephone, and somehow it all added up to the correct number of daily columns and Sunday stories. But the real me was in a dream—in a daze. I wanted to be brave. I wish I could say that I had been.

Margaret Ettinger went up with me, and later two other close friends, Merle Oberon and Virginia Zeanuck (Mrs. Darryl Zeanuck, whose husband was in Africa at the time, and later in the Aleutians), planed up. Merle had confided to my Doctor that she was afraid I would be ill and she wanted to be with me. Father English also came up by train—and in those last two days his Irish wit, his unfailing kindness and understanding, helped me more than I can tell.

The day finally came. I wanted to say my real good-byes to Harry alone at the hotel. I had seen numberless other wives in similar circumstances smiling bravely; I had seen mothers clinging to their boys, breaking down in their sorrow. I couldn't trust myself. We said good-bye alone—every minute becoming more and more precious.

When we finally joined the others for the trip down to the

docks I had myself under control. Jake Erlich, the well-known San Francisco lawyer, had asked me if I would like to present the Alma Spreckles farewell boxes containing cigarettes and candies and books for those youngsters sailing away, and I said I would do it gladly. Anything to keep me busy—anything to keep me occupied.

I went down the pier as far as I was permitted—laughing, somehow, with the boys about the boxes—clinging to my Doctor as long as I could. I heard him say as he kissed me, "We will never be separated again, darling, as long as we live. When I come back—we will never be separated again."

He left me then—and I could only stand there. The first time I had said good-bye to a man going overseas (Harriet's father) he had not returned. I watched my soldier, with his Major's cap so jaunty over his graying hair, as far as I could see him, and when he was out of sight I could only stand there in the middle of the street, waiting for—I don't know what.

Corey, the Irish cab driver, who was an old friend and who always drove us to Mass in San Francisco, came up and touched my arm. I followed him without a word. I think I knew where he was going. He drove me to Old St. Mary's, near Chinatown. "Go in," he said softly, opening the door for me. "You will feel better."

I went into the church. I don't know how long I stayed. Somehow I pulled myself together. I knew Harry would come back, but I also knew that until he did, that breathless pain would stay turning in my heart.

I came with Margaret and my friends back to Hollywood and to the Maple Drive house. I opened the door of the home where I had come as a bride, and for the first time I was home—and alone!

The telephone was ringing. It rang many times before I could reach it. Someone was insistently calling with news—

with something for the column—something about Hollywood that would amuse, or electrify, or jostle the reading folk—something that I might split an infinitive in writing, or let a participle dangle—something for the column of “The Gay Illiterate.”

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



111 542

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

